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Wednesday, 23 January 2013, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Masood Khan/Mr. Tarar	(Pakistan)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Oyarzábal
	Australia	Mr. White
	Azerbaijan	Mrs. Jafarova
	China	Mr. Hong Ming
	France	Ms. Legendre
	Guatemala	Ms. Bolaños Pérez
	Luxembourg	Mr. Maes
	Morocco	Mr. Erroja
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Shin Dong Ik
	Russian Federation	Mr. Zhdanov
	Rwanda	Mr. Kayinamura
	Togo	Mr. M'Beou
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Woodfield
	United States of America	Mr. Cenzer

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.05 p.m.

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Nigeria to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this meeting.

I wish to request all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Khalil (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to welcome the participation in this meeting of His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the observer State of Palestine, following the granting to Palestine of the status of non-member observer State in November. I also thank Mr. Robert Serry for the valuable presentation he gave on the developments that have taken place over the past three months.

(*spoke in English*)

Important developments have taken place since the last open meeting (see S/PV.6847) to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the issue of Palestine, three months ago.

First, President Obama was re-elected in the first week of November. His election renewed the hope for a fresh and effective engagement by the American Administration towards the peace process in the Middle East.

A week after the American elections, there was a limited escalation in Gaza. Egypt tried to mediate as soon as the escalation started. But before our efforts could bear fruit, they were undermined by the wide-scale Israeli aggression against Gaza that same week. That prompted us to demand the convening of an urgent meeting of the Security Council, on 14 November, to address the deteriorating situation. The Council held a closed meeting (see S/PV.6863) the same day, but was unable to take action. Nevertheless, we pursued our efforts to mediate between Israel and Hamas to stop the violence. We succeeded in reaching an agreement to calm down the situation, on 21 November. It included a number of arrangements aimed at sustaining the de-escalation. It also included the gradual loosening of the illegal blockade on Gaza and stopping the hostilities from both sides.

On 29 November, the General Assembly voted by an overwhelming majority to grant Palestine the status of observer State in the General Assembly (resolution 67/19). A total of 138 countries voted in favour and nine voted against; there were 42 abstentions. All of the statements made by States during that historic meeting of the General Assembly (see A/67/PV.44), whether in favour, against or in abstention, explained that they had taken their position in order to promote the peace process in the region.

Before that historic step in the General Assembly, Israel had promised to retaliate. It did deliver on its promise. In the period following the adoption of the resolution, the Israeli Government proceeded with a settlement frenzy in the occupied territories, especially Jerusalem. Fourteen members of the Council have issued separate statements denouncing this policy, which aims at imposing a fait accompli on the ground. Israel also seized the tax revenues of the Palestinian Authority, subjecting it to the threat of a financial collapse.

The Arab Foreign Ministers have met three times to address the situation in Palestine since our last meeting: in November, during the Israeli aggression against Gaza; in December; and in January. They took a number of decisions to condemn the settlement frenzy in the occupied territories and to support the Palestinian Authority and the reconciliation efforts in Palestine. They committed to exerting all efforts to give the peace process a last chance.

Egypt resumed its efforts for reconciliation in Palestine. This month the President of Egypt received the President of the State of Palestine. We also received the leaders of Hamas. Steps are currently being taken for the purpose of reconciliation.

Finally, the Israeli elections took place yesterday. The official results are yet to come, but preliminary results show that the current ruling party is ahead in the exit polls. During the election campaign, the Prime Minister of Israel vowed to continue and expand settlement activity. He reaffirmed on many occasions that Israel had the right to build in East Jerusalem.

In the middle of these important developments, we can identify two positive signs. First, the agreement for

the ceasefire in Gaza is still holding. Measures have been taken on both sides to de-escalate the situation. Arrangements have been made by Israel to loosen the blockade, including the expansion of the fishing area for Palestinians to six miles and limited access for trucks into Gaza.

Secondly, the process of Palestinian reconciliation is slowly resuming. We plan to organize a number of meetings in the near future for the two parties to resolve their differences.

Before our next meeting, three months from now, all of the parties, the international community and the Security Council in particular have to show a concrete engagement to contain the serious potential implications of the collapse of the peace process. Inaction is not an option. Incremental practical steps have to be taken in order to ensure stability in the region and save the peace process.

First, the sponsors of the peace process, including the American Administration, the European Union, Russia, the United Nations and all the parties have to recommit to a serious effort to resume the peace negotiations on the basis of the previously agreed terms of reference, with a view to reaching a final solution that would include the establishment of a Palestinian independent State on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Secondly, all current settlement plans in the occupied territories have to be frozen. No new plans should be approved. The Council should consider taking action in that regard.

Thirdly, reconciliation efforts in Palestine have to be encouraged in a clear and unequivocal way.

Fourthly, the situation on the ground in Palestine has to be improved. That applies to both Gaza and the West Bank. The blockade against Gaza has to be lifted. The financial embargo against the revenues of the Palestinian Authority has to end. The daily violence and abuse against the Palestinians has to stop.

We look forward to the achievement of all, or some, of those steps in the next three months. Meanwhile, Egypt will remain committed to working with all parties towards achieving a just and lasting peace for all the peoples and States of the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein (Jordan): All protocol observed, I wish to concentrate my statement today solely on the critical matter of settlement-building in the occupied Palestinian territories, without prejudice to the deep importance that we attach to the other pressing emergencies in our region, which I will come back to in our next intervention before the Council under this item.

In two days' time, the United Nations will begin marking the anniversary of liberation of Auschwitz and, in doing so, recall one of the grimmest episodes in human existence, when the Nazis, together with their collaborators in occupied Europe, destroyed most of eastern and central Europe's Jewish population, together with a large number of Jews drawn from western Europe, particularly from France, the Netherlands and Belgium.

The industrial annihilation of a people was hitherto unknown to a world that had long grown accustomed to campaigns of persecution and mass killing: we think in this regard of the suffering of indigenous nations, for example. The principal lesson from all those experiences has been clear: once we classify and subordinate others to categories not equal with ourselves, along a value chain not drawn from a universal perspective but defined narrowly by the individual communities themselves, we can easily slip into degrading the other, stigmatize them and blame them for whatever negative circumstances unfold, ultimately launching ourselves towards outcomes otherwise thought impossible and which became more possible with every curse.

The Arab-Israeli peace process has reached a crucial point, and the Council over the coming year will be the known to future generations as either the Council that presided over the end of one of the longest conflicts on its agenda, with the birth of a comprehensive settlement based on two States existing side by side in peace and security, or the Council that presided over more ignominious outcome: the burial of peace and the ruin of those living in the region.

We must now therefore do all we can to arrest any development affecting negatively the prospects of the relaunching of the final status negotiations. But we can hardly stitch a credible international effort together, with the fine adjustments it requires, if every week we are being buffeted by news of planned or new Israeli settlement activity, particularly were it to be in occupied East Jerusalem, or in E-1, which

denies the Palestinians contiguity and will doom peace for good. What is particularly vexing is that the law on this issue remains unaltered and abundantly clear, notwithstanding whatever decisions the Supreme Court of Israel may choose to take.

The applicable law in respect of the exercise by Israel of military control over the occupied State of Palestine is, once again, neither Israeli law nor whatever domestic law Israel sees fit to impose, but international humanitarian law, applicable to all high contracting parties as well as obligations that are erga omnes. Israel's administrative and military regulations, insofar as the West Bank is concerned, can be lawful only if they are utterly consistent with the Fourth Geneva Convention and its control guided strictly by its obligations as the occupying Power.

The International Court of Justice's position on this last point is crystal clear. It maintained in paragraph 78 of its 2004 advisory opinion that:

> "The territories situated between the Green Line [...] and the former eastern boundary of Palestine under the Mandate were occupied by Israel in 1967 during the armed conflict between Israel and Jordan. Under customary international law, these were therefore occupied territories in which Israel had the status of occupying Power. Subsequent events in these territories [...] have done nothing to alter this situation. All these territories (including East Jerusalem) remain occupied territories and Israel has continued to have the status of occupying Power." (*see A/ES-10/273*)

It is also worth noting that there are no territorial exceptions to this finding. All the territory of the West Bank, as described by the International Court of Justice, is considered occupied. A closer reading of resolution 242 (1967) also bears this point out, as we explained before the International Court of Justice on 24 February 2004. In his oral submission, the late Sir Arthur Watts, Q.C., Counsel for Jordan, noted how resolution 242 (1967)

> "affirmed, unanimously, the principle of Israel's withdrawal of its armed forces 'from territories occupied in the recent conflict' — and that meant, and could only mean, territories on the non-Israeli side of the Green Line. Thus the Green Line is the starting line from which is measured the extent of Israel's occupation of non-Israeli territory; originating in 1949 as an armistice line, it became in 1967 the line to the Israeli side of which Israel had to withdraw its forces, and on the non-Israeli side of which territory was 'occupied' by Israel."

The transfer by the occupying Power of parts of its own population into the territory it occupies represents a clear and continuing serious violation of the laws and customs applicable in international armed conflict, as codified by article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and which is also defined as a criminal act in article 8(2)(b)(viii) of the Rome Statute.

For those on the more extreme Israeli right who seem to be largely unaware of this last point, or are aware and do not much care, it is worth repeating again that in respect of the Rome Statute, and pending the Court's application of its jurisdiction over Palestine, which is something that may now become possible, we may move beyond simply State responsibility and cross into the domain of individual criminal liability.

The actions of the Israeli settler movement in the occupied Palestinian territories must, for obvious reasons, now stop, and the deep suffering of the Palestinian people must be brought to an end. The actions of States must be guided by customary international law, which this Council itself must uphold and not undermine.

Moreover, our deep opposition to the policy of settlement building and our repeated condemnation of it, which we reiterate today, are not founded on some form of bigotry toward the Jewish people. What they are built on is a continuing, three-decade-long violation of international humanitarian law, confirmed by the International Court of Justice in its advisory opinion of 2004 and understood as such by the vast majority of States existing in the world today.

Finally, we hope that the international community will be seized by the urgency of these delicate moments to create the necessary conditions for the resumption of the final status talks, within which the final shape of the borders will no doubt be dealt with early. In this vein, it is also worth recalling how, in negotiating the draft for what became resolution 242 (1967), the understanding reached between the principal interlocutors was for a withdrawal from all non-Israeli territory, with only minor reciprocal border rectifications.

Ultimately, our hope is to see the occupation of all Arab lands ended fully, for the Palestinians to live free in their new State and, 68 years after the Holocaust,

for the Israelis to feel secure, with all of us in the region working together in the shade of a permanent comprehensive peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mrs. Ribeiro Viotti (Brazil): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this open debate. I also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, for his briefing. Brazil appreciates the participation of Minister Riad Malki and the contribution of the Permanent Representative of Israel.

As this is the first open debate on this issue since the historical adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 67/19, let me reiterate Brazil's great satisfaction at the unequivocal support of the international community for the Palestinian request for observer State status in the United Nations. Brazil congratulates the people and the Government of the State of Palestine on that development, which we believe will reinforce the path towards a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian question.

As we begin another year, prospects for peace in the Middle East seem to be growing increasingly remote. The passing of time has only added new complexities to the situation and intensified the need for diplomatic efforts towards sustainable solutions for new and long-standing challenges.

The international community is, unfortunately, still failing to effectively assist with solutions to the most important political problems affecting the region. The Council would, in this regard, set a meaningful example by displaying a stronger determination to seriously deal with this issue through sustained, regular debate.

Throughout 2012, the window for a two-State solution continued to narrow, and more people in Gaza, Syria, Lebanon and southern Israel continued to suffer the consequences of inaction.

The situation has been further aggravated by the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. That illegal practice remains a serious obstacle to peace in the region and to the realization of the two-State solution. The construction of Israeli settlements in the so-called E-1 area and other recent settlement construction in the Palestinian occupied territory are of particular concern. Israel should reconsider its decision. Such activity undermines the prospects for a two-State solution, is illegal under international law and constitutes a major obstacle to peace. Not only must Israeli settlement construction be completely frozen; settlements must be dismantled and the occupation must end.

Progress is urgently needed in 2013. The international community has long been in possession of the blueprint for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The essential missing element is the political resolve to apply it through a reliable process.

Brazil reiterates its call on the Security Council to fully carry out its responsibilities. The promotion of peace in the Middle East is in the interest of all members of the United Nations and cannot be delegated to third parties. As stated previously by my Government, an inoperative Quartet and a silent Security Council do not serve the interests of peace in the Middle East.

The recent conflict in Gaza was yet another reminder of the human, political and material costs of the indefinite protraction of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and of the paralysis of the peace process.

The Brazilian Government protests in the strongest terms the destruction by Israeli forces, during the most recent conflict in Gaza, of the Al Sikka bridge serving the inhabitants of Moghraqa, Wadi Gaza village, Buricj and Nuseirat, which had recently been rebuilt by the United Nations Development Programme with Brazilian funds. It is simply unacceptable that the civilian population should pay the price.

It is positive that the ceasefire agreed upon by the parties was upheld. Human life must be equally protected, be it in Gaza City or in Sderot. A sustainable solution for this issue involves the repudiation of violence and extremism by all actors, Palestinian reconciliation, the end of the Gaza blockade and the resumption of the peace process.

Concerning Syria, we are appalled by the current level of violence against civilians. We have strongly condemned the attack at Aleppo University. Brazil reiterates the need for an independent investigation to identify those responsible for that act and bring them to justice. We are also concerned by the situation of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries. Brazil has contributed to the activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey in order to diminish their suffering.

Violence in Syria compromises the future of the country, yet both the Government and the opposition continue to disregard the imperative for a negotiated solution and to wrongly believe that they can prevail by military means. The primary responsibility for the cessation of violence certainly lies with the Syrian Government, but we are also aware of the responsibilities of the armed opposition groups and of the presence of radical elements among the rebels.

All parties must fulfil their obligations to halt violence and respect international humanitarian law, as well as actively engage in finding a peaceful solution to the conflict. The international consensus is that there is no military solution to the conflict. The only path forward is through an inclusive Syrian-led political process.

At the present juncture, support for the work of the Joint Special Envoy, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, is even more important. Brazil calls on all actors, including the Security Council, to redouble their efforts to find a multilaterally agreed solution to the crisis, as provided for in the final communiqué of the Action Group for Syria (S/2012/522, annex), which retains its relevance today as a consensus document. Efforts must concentrate on the need to end bloodshed immediately, to promote stability and to help the parties to negotiate in good faith.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. It is an issue of great importance to regional and international peace and security, especially in the circumstances currently prevailing in the Middle East.

At the outset, I would like to confirm our endorsement of the statements that have been and will be made on behalf of the Group of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Non-Aligned Movement. I also salute the presence among us of the Foreign Minister of the State of Palestine and his participation in this meeting, and I thank Mr. Robert Serry for his comprehensive briefing.

The Palestinian cause has witnessed important developments since the last Council debate on the issue (see S/PV.6847). Through its resolution 67/19, adopted on 29 November 2012, the General Assembly granted Palestine the status of a non-member observer State of the United Nations. After the adoption of that resolution, Israel started expanding settlements and increasing the number of residential units in existing ones. In his briefing to the Council last month (see S/PV.6894), the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs noted Israel's announcement in the wakes of that adoption that it would continue planning for the construction of thousands of residential units in the area between Jerusalem and the Ma'ale Adumim settlement. He went on to say that the Israeli Government had decided to speed up the construction of approximately 6,500 residential units in East Jerusalem. That was the Israeli Government's response to resolution 67/19.

As another means of punishing the Palestinian people, Israel refused to pay the tax and customs revenues due to the Palestinian Authority. That is a violation of the Paris Protocol, which stipulates that tax revenues must be transferred. To alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia gave budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority in the amount of $100 million. The Israeli occupation of Palestinian land has become one of the longest-standing occupation issues that this Organization has dealt with. We hear statements in this and other bodies expressing the strong belief on the part of the international community and the United Nations in the justice of the Palestinian cause and the inevitability of putting an end to their plight. However, practically speaking, the Council is paralysed and helpless because the occupying Power continues to disregard the international community and carry on with its brutal and unjust policies.

In his most recent report on the situation in the Middle East (S/2012/701), the Secretary-General states that settlement expansion undermines the territorial basis for a future Palestinian State. The settlements incontrovertibly violate the Fourth Geneva Convention, which forbids occupying Powers to change the demographics of the land or to confiscate territory. The settlements deal a death blow to the possibility of a peaceful settlement to the Palestinian question based on the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the two-State solution.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as the guardian of Islamic holy sites, is deeply concerned about the Israeli practices in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. The Security Council and the General Assembly have adopted over

10 resolutions pertaining to Jerusalem and the need to avoid any negative impact on its religious and spiritual significance. Nevertheless, over half of Israeli settlers live in the area of Jerusalem and its environs, and increasingly in the area between southern Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The most recent resolution on Jerusalem was Assembly resolution 67/24, adopted on 30 October 2012 and entitled "Jerusalem". Its first paragraph states that any measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to impose its laws and sovereignty are illegal and null and void and lack all legitimacy.

Israel continues its campaign of demolition in the area surrounding the holy sites in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, both above ground and especially under and around the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque, in an effort to weaken its foundation, which would lead to its eventual collapse. The excavations around Al-Aqsa Mosque have increased to almost 30 locations. Meanwhile, Israel continues to demolish the homes of Palestinian Jerusalemites and to cancel their residency rights, continuing to evict many Palestinian families from their homes in East Jerusalem, leaving them homeless.

That is without even mentioning the behaviour of Israeli settlers in the city who commit provocations, including damaging and desecrating mosques and churches. The Council is obligated to compel Israel to cease its current policies and abide by Council and Assembly resolutions. The time has come to do away with the permanent immunity that Israel has enjoyed, to take the measures necessary to guarantee the independence of the State of Palestine, and to put an end to the occupation of its territories. The occupation of the Syrian Arab Golan and the Shab'a farms and other Lebanese territories, must also come to and end. Failure to act will deeply hurt the credibility and stature of the United Nations and the Security Council.

The tragic situation in Syria has recently taken a serious turn for the worse, with increased killings from air raids conducted by the Syrian Government against its own citizens. It has come to the point of treating its citizens as enemies, killing them and destroying their homes. The number of victims is now more than 60,000, while the number of refugees and internally displaced persons is in the millions.

Everyone can see that the Syrian regime has lost its legitimacy and can no longer remain in power. It fights to the very end in order to cling to its vanishing authority. It seeks to portray the situation as a dispute between that country and its neighbours, while in fact its people have risen in revolt and have clearly expressed their will, which must be respected. Its clinging to power over the corpses of martyrs cannot continue. Threatening to destroy Damascus so that it collapses around its people is only a sign of despair and bankruptcy.

The Syrian people feel bitter about the international community's lack of action and at the fact that the Security Council has abandoned them. The Council has to date been unable to stop the Government killing machine. Instead, the killing machine has grown stronger and broadened its scope, committing crimes against humanity and horrendous massacres. My country therefore demands that all perpetrators of those crimes be held accountable before international justice. It calls on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities in that regard.

As it notes with distress the events in Syria, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has not hesitated to shoulder its responsibility by coming to the help of the Syrian people and providing humanitarian assistance and relief aid to the tune of several hundreds of millions of dollars. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will actively participate in the donor conference called for by the Secretary-General, to be held at the end of this month in the State of Kuwait, in order to meet the needs of the Syrian people.

Moreover, the Kingdom was among the first countries to recognize the Syrian National Coalition, recognized to date by more than one hundred States. The Coalition must therefore now be given the opportunity to represent the Syrian people in all organizations, bodies and forums. That position of Saudi Arabia stems from its great grief and sadness at the events we witness daily — the killing, destruction and genocide committed by the regime against unarmed civilians.

Our country notes that the Security Council has been very slow to take action in response to the tragic situation in Syria and to assume its humanitarian, moral and regional responsibilities. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia urges the Council to respond to the appeals of the Syrian people and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. We call on the Council to promptly act with resolve under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations in order to put an end to the killing being perpetrated by the Syrian regime. We urge it to work towards achieving a real and

peaceful transfer of power that meets the aspirations and expectations of the Syrian people for freedom, dignity and prosperity and that preserves the unity and territorial integrity of Syria, while respecting the diversity of its people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Haniff (Malaysia): At the outset, I wish to extend my sincere congratulations to you, Mr. President, and to your country, Pakistan, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. On a similar note, I wish to thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator of the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

My delegation wishes to associates itself with the statements to be made by the representatives of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

In November last year, we witnessed the will of the international community when the General Assembly granted Palestine non-member observer State status (resolution 67/19). While we rejoice at that development, we condemn the racist and uncivilized actions of Israel in relation to that event since then. Israel has continued its expansionist policy by approving new illegal settlements in the West Bank and in the E-1 area close to East Jerusalem. On 8 January, Prime Minister Netanyahu claimed that Israel's construction and expansion of those illegal settlements do not pose any threat to the peace process. That is absurd and preposterous. That move by Israel is clear proof that it views international law and world opinion with disdain. What is more apparent is that Israel is not interested in peace. My delegation believes that the further expansion of illegal settlements will scuttle the two-State solution.

Israel continues to illegally alter the reality on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory. It seems adamant in destroying the will of the Palestinians to govern themselves. Israel's seizure of Palestinian tax revenues is not only unlawful and shameful, but is another act of atrocity aimed at weakening and punishing the Palestinian National Authority. The world cannot turn a blind eye to those illegal actions by Israel. Major Powers should prove to the world that their foreign policy and actions on the issue of Palestine are decided in their capitals, not in Tel Aviv.

Israel must be made to realize that its future and its security lie within the principles of the establishment of a Palestinian State under the two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. Israel must also cease all illegal settlement activities and the demolition of Palestinian structures, which are in violation of international law. It must be forced to respect and restore the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Israel must heed international calls to lift the illegal blockade on Gaza immediately. Only then can Israelis and Palestinians live side by side in peace and security.

The impasse in the Middle East is not impossible to resolve, but we need pragmatic solutions based on international principles and norms. It requires all influential Powers to display strong political leadership in considering the mutually reinforcing needs of the peoples and nations in the region. It goes without saying that the Security Council must play its intended role by fulfilling its mandate to enforce its resolutions in pursuit of a sustainable solution to the question of Palestine, thus restoring its credibility. We must collectively pledge such efforts in order to rid the world of insecurity and conflict and to replace them with sustainable peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your outstanding leadership of the presidency of the Council this month. I thank Morocco for its stewardship of the Council last month. I also wish to thank Mr. Robert Serry for his detailed briefing this morning. I welcome the presence of the Foreign Minister of the State of Palestine and his participation in this meeting. I would like to welcome the new Council members and pay tribute to the outgoing members.

This is the first debate of 2013 on this issue. The Group of Arab States would therefore like to reaffirm the fact that 2013 will be a decisive turning point with regard to the Middle East, in particular the Palestinian question, which is the primary cause of the Arab world. On 29 November 2012, we witnessed the historic granting to Palestine of non-member observer State status in the United Nations. It is the first major individual achievement in many years on the path to lasting and comprehensive peace and the two-State solution. It is particularly important at a time

when the international community has demonstrated its incapacity to compel the occupying Power, Israel, to respect the unanimous will of the international community and to end the occupation of Palestine through ensuring the implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions, including those of the Security Council.

It is unacceptable that, to date, the international community has continued to adopt the same approach of many decades in addressing the Palestinian question. It is high time for the world, through the United Nations and particularly the Security Council, to assume its direct responsibilities in the maintenance of international peace and security, particularly since Israel has continued to occupy Arab and Palestinian lands and to maintain its illegal and illicit activities in blatant violation of all international laws and instruments, including the building of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

In that context, the deliberate violations carried out by the Israeli Government have escalated, as if Israel is attempting to further punish the Palestinian people and their leaders in view of their diplomatic, political and legal successes at the multilateral level that have promoted Palestine to the rank of observer State to the United Nations.

The escalation of activity, including settlement construction, led to the Israeli Government's announcement of three thousand additional units to be built in Palestinian territory, namely, East Jerusalem, and the completion of the so-called E-1 settlement complex, which would isolate East Jerusalem, separate it from the West Bank and cut the geographic link between the north and the south of the West Bank. That is an additional threat made by the State of Israel, and it highlights the illegitimacy of its settlement activities. It also represents a major obstacle to the achievement of a solution based on two States living side by side within the pre-1967 borders.

Unsatisfied with their actions so far, Israeli forces also savagely acted against Palestinian activists who were demonstrating against Israeli expansionist policies and peacefully attempting to protect their land by setting up Palestinian villages that they call Bab al-Shams and Bab al-Karamah.

We vehemently condemn the continuing Israeli violations against the Palestinian people and their land. In 2012, the occupying Power killed 226 Palestinians, including more than 60 women and children, and injured 2,300. It also destroyed 2,100 homes and facilities and uprooted more than seven thousand fruit trees, and authorized the construction of 26,000 new housing units. Israel must realize that its continuing crimes will have negative consequences and that those who perpetrate the crimes will not escape from justice.

Israel must be held responsible for the health of all of the Palestinian detainees and prisoners, given that its detention policy spares no sector of Palestinian society.

The Arab Group also condemns Israel's piracy through its control of Palestine's trade channels and crossings, particularly its refusal to transfer tax and customs revenues to the Palestinians. That revenue is fundamentally important to the economy of the State of Palestine, which has already suffered serious challenges due to Israeli policies limiting the movement of goods and individuals both inside and outside of Palestine. Beyond the piracy implications, the Palestinian Authority faces difficulty in paying the salaries of its civil servants, which has affected the interests of about 1 million Palestinian citizens. From the viewpoint of the Arab Group, we call upon the international community to take immediate action to compel Israel to release the Palestinian tax revenues and to refrain from such illegitimate and immoral practices.

The Arab Group welcomes the positive signs that have emerged from the meetings recently held in Cairo, with the aim of accelerating reconciliation between the Palestinian factions. The Arab Group welcomes, in this context, the great efforts of Cairo and the Arab League towards Palestinian reconciliation, which is an Arab priority.

Arab and Palestinian hands are fully extended to ensure a just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of two States — an independent State of Palestine within the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, alongside the State of Israel, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Israel has continued to play its role as the occupying Power and to demonstrate its arrogance in the region. It has preferred that role, rather than a role aimed at establishing natural and normal relations with neighbouring States. Yesterday parliamentary elections took place in Israel. During the campaign, we heard

the negative slogans of a number of parties. Therefore, we must tirelessly continue our efforts to end Israeli violations of international law in order to achieve peace in the region.

All efforts could be undermined if Israel continues to violate international law and to hamper international Arab efforts to achieve peace, as it has continued to do in recent years. We therefore call upon the international community to take immediate action in proposing a serious initiative with an established deadline and time frame for all parties, aimed at achieving two States in line with international legitimacy and with the peace process.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Djibouti.

Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti): First of all, Mr. President, on behalf of the member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, your able team and your country on the excellent conduct in steering the work of the Council for the month.

Amid a rapidly changing situation in the Middle East, the Palestinian question remains at the heart of the outstanding issues that require the utmost attention of and prompt intervention from this body, which has so far failed to address and correct the injustices that Israel has been inflicting on the Palestinian people from 1948 until today. The Palestinian people's aspirations to realize their legitimate dreams and rights to freedom, sovereignty and self-determination and to practice the principles of equity, justice and human dignity in their own independent State on their own homeland, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, are systematically blocked and denied. Their long-standing question is still unresolved and peace and justice are unsecured, and the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is ultimately made permanent.

After 20 years of painful, tortuous and often futile negotiations, prospects for peace and justice in the region are now diminishing more rapidly than ever. Indeed, Israel's occupation policies and practices continue to undermine the vision of the two-State solution and to defy the will of the international community through settlement, construction, land annexation, appropriation of properties, isolation of East Jerusalem from the Palestinian territory, and so on, all in violation of international law and relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

Indeed, it would be hard not to notice the emergence and proliferation of parties in Israel with hard-line positions and the primary goal of supporting settlements and not making peace with the Palestinians, thus leaving the fate of Palestinian statehood hanging in the balance. Definitely, while Israeli settlement policies constitute a standing challenge, the current stalemate in the peace process is neither acceptable nor conducive to a just and lasting settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Meanwhile, the recognition and upgrading of Palestine status to non-member observer State at the United Nations constitutes a timely and fundamental opportunity that should not be lost but rather fully utilized to create a new momentum for reviving the currently deadlocked peace process and to create genuine progress in the pursuit of a just and durable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one that will lead to the comprehensive realization of the independence of the State of Palestine on the basis of pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The realization of peace and stability in the Middle East is an utmost priority for the OIC and the international community alike, given that a credible political process, to which the OIC remains committed, is of strategic significance to the entire region and beyond. Therefore, the OIC remains firm in its conviction that the Security Council must not be absolved of its role and duties under the Charter of the United Nations to take necessary and immediate actions to ensure that Israel halts its occupation and settlement policies, so as to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights in line with United Nations resolutions and international law, and eventually to maintain the internationally endorsed two-State solution.

Our debate today coincides with the most intense and aggressive Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem in particular, where Israel continues to pursue a systematic process of altering the city's indigenous demographic composition and character and creating facts on the ground. Israeli policies are designed to isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the Palestinian environs, in defiance of the unanimity of the international stance, United Nations resolutions

and international law. At this crucial phase, there must be continued economic, financial and political support for the Palestinian people with a view to enhancing the sustainability, viability and existence of the Palestinian State, which faces dire financial challenges due to arbitrary Israeli measures and illegal withholding of Palestinian revenues.

The OIC will continue to stress that resolving the Middle East conflict hinges on a comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question. The international consensus to realize the vision of the two-State solution requires a clear stance based on international legality and justice. There must also be full acknowledgement of and respect for historical commitments and pledges made in that regard, as embodied in relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Kodama (Japan): I would like to thank Pakistan for convening this open debate. I also wish to express appreciation to Mr. Robert Serry for his briefing.

Japan has long understood the Palestinians' aspiration to build an independent State and has supported the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Japan thus endorses a two-State solution under which Israel and a future independent Palestinian State would coexist side by side in peace and security. In light of that, last November Japan voted in favour of General Assembly resolution 67/19, regarding the status of Palestine at the United Nations, and welcomes the fact that the resolution was adopted with the support of a large number of Member States.

Palestine now bears greater responsibilities vis-à-vis the international community. Japan once again calls upon Palestine not to use the non-member observer State status accorded by the General Assembly resolution to act in a way that might negatively affect or hinder direct negotiations with Israel. We ask for prudence with respect to its conduct, such as applying for membership in international organizations — an action that might negatively affect prospects for the resumption of negotiations.

As for the situation in Gaza, we welcome the fact that the calm brokered by Egypt in November has largely held so far. We urge all parties concerned to continue to respect the ceasefire with a view to realizing a durable calm in Gaza. We also encourage tangible steps towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation, while rejecting any attempt to promote violence or to deny Israel's right to exist.

It is regrettable that negotiations between the parties remain stalled, putting in danger the prospect for a two-State solution. Japan requests both Palestine and Israel to establish relationships of mutual trust and to promptly return to the negotiation table. Japan will continue to actively contribute to moving the Middle East peace process forward, in cooperation with the United States, Arab countries, the Quartet and other partners.

In that context, we deeply deplore that, after the adoption of the General Assembly resolution, the Israeli Government announced its approval of the large-scale construction of housing units in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Settlement activities need to be frozen, as they are a violation of international law. Japan is also worried about a temporary suspension of the transfer of tax revenues that Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. Support for the fiscal stability of the Palestinian Authority is a necessary task that Israel should carry out. We strongly hope that following Israel's national elections yesterday, the new Government to be formed will create conditions for a resumption of meaningful peace negotiations by rescinding those decisions, which are only exacerbating tensions between the parties.

With respect to assistance to Palestine, Japan, together with Palestine, will hold a conference on cooperation among East Asian countries for Palestinian development in February in Tokyo. Japan will thus contribute to promoting assistance to the Palestinians in cooperation with other East Asian countries.

Addressing the issues of Palestinian refugees is also of critical importance. Bearing in mind the crucial role that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)plays in this matter, since last November Japan has extended to it another $10 million in assistance, including $7.7 million in food aid. Japan remains firmly committed to making substantial contributions to support UNRWA activities.

Allow me now to touch upon Syria. Japan is deeply concerned by the serious and worsening situation in Syria and profoundly deplores the death of many thousands of people as a result of continued violence. An attack against the University of Aleppo last week is

further tragic testimony to that. As an active member of the Group of Friends of the Syrian People, Japan reiterates its call on all parties in Syria to immediately halt the violence and abuses of human rights, and condemns the Syrian authorities for not keeping their own commitments and responsibilities to protect their own citizens. We support the diplomatic efforts of Mr. Brahimi, the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, and once again emphasize the importance of advancing the process of a Syrian-led political transition.

Faced with this appalling situation, we cannot remain mere spectators. Last week, on Switzerland's initiative, 57 countries, including Japan, jointly sent a letter to the President of the Security Council, requesting that the situation in Syria be referred to the International Criminal Court (S/2013/19, annex). We call on the Council to duly recognize the importance of ensuring accountability for crimes committed on the ground, and to send an unequivocal message demanding that international human rights and humanitarian law be observed by the Syrian authorities and all other parties.

With the harsh winter inflicting tremendous suffering on a growing number of refugees on the ground, there is an urgent need to address the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria. Japan commends the Secretary-General's initiative to convene a high-level international humanitarian pledging conference for Syria, to be held on 30 January in Kuwait City. The Government of Japan intends to dispatch a senior-level delegation from the capital with a view to making a significant contribution to international efforts.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Archbishop Chullikatt (Holy See): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Pakistan on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and on organizing today's debate, focusing on the centrality of peace in the Middle East, not only for the peoples of the region but also for the international community. I would also like to thank you, Mr. President, for inviting the Holy See to take the floor in this important debate.

The Holy See has actively and attentively followed the steps leading to Palestine's new status at the United Nations as a non-member observer State, and welcomes General Assembly resolution 67/19, while noting that such an outcome does not in itself constitute a solution adequate to the problems in the region. It remains a matter of deep concern to my delegation that the international community has failed to engage the Israelis and Palestinians in significant, substantive dialogue and dispute resolution so as to bring stability and peace to both. Solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains the key to a series of questions affecting the region more broadly, not to mention the consequences for the wider world. The Holy See therefore aligns itself with other delegations in calling for a resumption of the peace process and a commitment by all parties to a peaceful resolution of their disputes.

On 15 May 2009, at the conclusion of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Pope Benedict XVI passionately expressed the following sentiments, which have a substantive bearing on our work:

> "No more bloodshed! No more fighting! No more terrorism! No more war! Instead, let us break the vicious circle of violence. Let there be lasting peace based on justice; let there be genuine reconciliation and healing. Let it be universally recognized that the State of Israel has the right to exist, and to enjoy peace and security within internationally agreed borders. Let it be likewise acknowledged that the Palestinian people have a right to a sovereign, independent homeland, to live with dignity and to travel freely. Let the two-State solution become a reality, not remain a dream."

The Holy See's Secretary for Relations with States, Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, speaking before the General Assembly in 2011, expressed the hope that the competent bodies of the United Nations would strive to give concrete implementation to that goal (see A/66/PV.28). Today the Holy See vigorously renews that essential plea and the wisdom underlying the need for a commitment to dialogue as an antidote to the violence that continues to destabilize this region.

At various times, the Holy See has invited the leaders of the two peoples, Israeli and Palestinian, who have suffered so much, and of those nations that have a particular responsibility in the region, to do all they can to restart and reinvigorate the negotiations in good faith, and to avoid actions, such as making conditions, that contradict declarations of goodwill and the sincere search for meaningful solutions that can ensure a secure foundation for peace for these great peoples. Real peace

in the Middle East will come only as a result of mutual understanding and respect among all the peoples of the region, Jews, Christians and Muslims. Peace requires courageous decisions and unwavering commitments.

The international community, together with the Quartet, which has been involved in the Middle East peace process, must demonstrate leadership in bringing the provisions of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) to a successful conclusion, because that document is the juridical basis for the existence of two States. Like other members of the international community, and in full support of the role and efforts of the larger family of nations in helping to resolve the crisis in the Middle East, the Holy See is convinced that the ongoing crisis will be resolved only when respect for justice and the legitimate aspirations of the two peoples, Israeli and Palestinian, are preserved and guaranteed by them and by the international community at large.

In the hope that the problems caused by the many conflicts of the region will finally be resolved through good-faith negotiations, respectful dialogue and equitable compromise, the Holy See further underlines that a lasting solution must include a decision on the status of the holy city of Jerusalem and its internationally guaranteed protection, essential to the patrimony of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. As Pope Benedict XVI recently stated in his address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, Jerusalem must be an element of peace and unity for the peoples of the world and therefore never a source of division. The Holy See hereby renews its support for internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure freedom of religion and of conscience for its inhabitants, as well as permanent, free and unhindered access to the holy places for the faithful of all religions and nationalities.

Moreover, let us not forget that resolution 181 (II) foresaw a special international status for the city of Jerusalem and its environs, to be administered by the Trusteeship Council. We know that similar ideas have recently been put forward by some of the parties, in the context of peace discussions, and we sincerely hope that they will be pursued. Indeed, the only way to resolve the delicate issue of Jerusalem in a definitive, just and lasting way, as well as to secure the guaranteed provisions for freedom of religion and access to the holy places called for at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly and in other resolutions, might be to involve the United Nations in the holy city's safekeeping and administration in some relevant and effective capacity.

Turning to the sad events in Syria, the Holy See is deeply concerned about the worsening situation and the humanitarian aspects of the crisis. The Holy See has reiterated several times that a military solution to the Syrian crisis is untenable. My delegation joins with those who urge the parties concerned, for the same love of that people they wish to protect, to end the violence and bloodshed and to come to the negotiating table, under the auspices of the international community, in order to begin a transition towards a peaceful civil society, with no discrimination based on ethnicity or belief, and respectful of its long history of peaceful coexistence among its diverse religions, ethnicities and cultures.

In fact, the Holy Land and the entire Middle East are characterized by the presence of this mosaic of different cultures, languages, religions and confessions, which bestows such an enviable pride of beauty on their history and their contributions to the enduring civilizations of the world. The bimillenary presence of Christians in those lands is a factor of richness that must be respected, promoted and preserved. It is a matter of fundamental rights rooted in the very essence of that ancient civilization, which must be duly protected by the respective Governments — and we welcome here their attention so far accorded to that issue — and supported by the international community.

The theme of Pope Benedict XVI's message for this year's International Day of Peace refers to Jesus' words, "Blessed are the peacemakers". Allow me therefore to conclude by recalling the Pope's address here before the Council, so that all who are responsible for the well-being of the peoples of the Middle East may listen and reflect on that message, because every action intended to hasten the realization of peace will constitute a legacy that ennobles the name of all peacemakers, for they are the human guarantors of that which dignifies the human person and the family of nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Vrailas: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The acceding country Croatia; the candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential

candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine, align themselves with this statement.

With regard to the Middle East peace process, the European Union firmly believes that now is the time to take bold and concrete steps towards peace. The parties must engage in direct and substantial negotiations without preconditions in order to achieve a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ending all claims. The European Union underlines the urgency of renewed, structured and substantial peace efforts in 2013, and towards that end it is ready to work with the new United States Administration and other international partners, including within the Quartet.

There will be no sustainable peace until the Palestinians' aspirations to statehood and sovereignty and those of Israelis to security are fulfilled through a comprehensive negotiated peace, based on the two-State solution. The viability of a two-State solution must be maintained. The European Union expresses deep concern about developments on the ground that threaten to make a two-State solution impossible.

The European Union is deeply dismayed by and strongly opposes Israeli plans to expand settlements in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem and in particular Givat Hamatos, and plans to develop the E-1 area. Construction in Givat Hamatos cuts geographic continuity between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The E-1 plan, if implemented, would seriously undermine the prospects of a negotiated resolution of the conflict by jeopardizing the possibility of a contiguous and viable Palestinian State and of Jerusalem as the future capital of two States. It could also entail the forced transfer of the civilian population. The European Union reiterates that settlements are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace. In the light of its core objective of achieving a two-State solution, the European Union will closely monitor the situation and its broader implications, and act accordingly.

As we have stated before, the European Union will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders other than those agreed by the parties. The European Union also believes that the following further parameters could serve as a basis for a resumption of negotiations: first, security arrangements that, for Palestinians, respect their sovereignty and show that the occupation is over, and, for Israelis, protect their security, prevent the resurgence of terrorism and deal effectively with new and emerging threats; secondly, a just, fair and agreed solution to the refugee question; and, thirdly, the fulfilment of the aspirations of both parties concerning Jerusalem. A way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both States.

The setting up of an internationally supported framework for direct negotiations between the parties would be instrumental in the resumption of such negotiations. The European Union remains in close contact with the parties and with the Union's partners within the Quartet, as well as with other key actors, with the clear aim of achieving significant progress as soon as possible.

The European Union recalls that the Arab Peace Initiative provides regional support for a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. The European Union will work with those who are willing to join in such a quest for peace, stability and prosperity.

The European Union calls on Israel to resume without delay the transfers of Palestinian tax and clearance revenues it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, and without further interruption, in line with the Paris Protocol. Cuts in those transfers jeopardize the viability of the Palestinian Authority, have a critical impact on the provision of basic services for the Palestinian population, and present a considerable threat to the security situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and beyond.

It is of the utmost importance that the Palestinian Authority continue to receive strong political and financial support from the international community as a whole. The European Union recently decided on a front-loading of its budget support to the Palestinian Authority and calls on other donors, in particular Arab countries, to fully honour their commitments.

The European Union calls on the new Israeli Government that will be formed after yesterday's election, as well as on the Palestinian leadership, to reaffirm their commitment to the two-State solution and to engage in direct and substantial negotiations without preconditions.

On 29 November 2012, the General Assembly voted in favour of resolution 67/19 on the granting of non-member observer State status in the United Nations to Palestine. The European Union calls on the Palestinian leadership to use that new status constructively and not to undertake steps that would

deepen the lack of trust and lead further away from a negotiated solution.

Despite the ceasefire, the status quo in the Gaza Strip remains unsustainable. Fully recognizing Israel's legitimate security needs, the European Union reiterates its call for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from the Gaza Strip, the situation of which will be unsustainable as long as it remains politically and economically separated from the West Bank. Equally, the issue of illegal weapons transfers into the Gaza Strip has to be effectively addressed as a matter of urgency. It is vital that all parts of the agreement on the cessation of hostilities be implemented and that talks on a durable ceasefire agreement continue.

The European Union commends the efforts of Egypt and all those who engaged in mediation. The European Union is committed to facilitating the social and economic development of the Gaza Strip. The European Union expresses its readiness to make use of its instruments in support of the parties' efforts, including the possible reactivation, in the appropriate way, of the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Rafah. The European Union underlines its readiness to explore further ways to address the situation in the Gaza Strip, including with concerned parties in the region, in line with resolution 1860 (2009).

The European Union reiterates its call for intra-Palestinian reconciliation behind the strong leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, in line with the principles set out in his speech of 4 May 2011, as an important element for the unity of a future Palestinian State and for reaching a two-State solution. It is in the fundamental interest of the European Union to support peace and democracy in the entire region, and a strategic priority to see an end to a conflict that will continue to undermine peace and security along the EU's southern borders as long as it remains unresolved.

The European Union is appalled by the increasingly deteriorating situation in Syria, primarily due to the unprecedented use of force by the regime. It also condemns all attacks, including terrorist acts, that indiscriminately target civilians. The European Union is seriously concerned about the potential use and transfer of chemical weapons in Syria, and reminds the Syrian regime and other parties that, in case of their use, those responsible will be held accountable. The European Union underlines the necessity of the complete destruction of those chemical weapons at the earliest date practicable, and urges Syria to accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention as soon as possible. The European Union remains deeply concerned by the spillover effects of the Syrian crisis in neighbouring countries. It remains committed to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria.

The European Union reiterates its full support for the efforts undertaken by the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, to achieve a Syrian-led peaceful political transition based on the principles included in the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012, and calls on all parties to actively engage with Mr. Brahimi. The European Union continues to call on all members of the Security Council to uphold their responsibilities.

The European Union encourages the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces to continue working on its structures, to become more operational and inclusive, and to remain committed to respecting the principles of human rights, inclusiveness and democracy and to engaging with all sections of Syrian civil society. The European Union encourages the Coalition to engage further with the Joint Special Representative, and stands ready to engage with and support the Coalition in those endeavours and its relations with the international community at large.

The European Union reiterates its support for strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations and stresses their importance for the building of the future democratic Syria. It also acknowledges the importance of supporting local civilian structures throughout Syria.

The European Union reiterates its call on all parties to the conflict to facilitate humanitarian access and aid delivery to the people in need, to ensure the neutrality of humanitarian aid, and to strictly abide by international humanitarian law. The pledging conference in Kuwait on 30 January will be an important opportunity. The EU will reaffirm its engagement to the Syrian population in Syria and in neighbouring countries affected by the crisis and that are generously hosting Syrian refugees. The European Union will also call on all donors to step up their response, in coordination with the United Nations and in full respect of humanitarian principles. The overall humanitarian contribution so far from the EU and its member States amounts to over €333 million.

The European Union remains deeply concerned about widespread and systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that, according to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The European Union recalls that all those responsible for such crimes must be held accountable and that there should be no impunity for such violations and abuses. The European Union has repeatedly stated that, if concerns about war crimes and crimes against humanity are not adequately addressed at the national level, the International Criminal Court should deal with the situation. The Security Council can refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, as requested in the Swiss letter to the Security Council of 14 January, at any time (S/2013/19, annex). The European Union calls on the Security Council to urgently address the situation in Syria in all its aspects, including that issue.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Diallo (*spoke in French*): I am pleased to see Pakistan, one of the founding members of our Committee, holding the presidency of the Security Council this month. Having been elected on many occasions to the Security Council, your country, Mr. President, inspires considerable respect because of its contributions to the work of that body and to the maintenance of peace in general. Allow me also to thank Mr. Robert Serry for his very useful briefing on the situation in the Middle East.

Recently, in October, our Committee and member States warned the Security Council of the dangers of not taking action in the light of the deteriorating situation in Gaza. The conflict in November cost the lives of many people, mostly Palestinians, and caused considerable material damage to that enclave, which is still suffering the impact of the last war. While welcoming the diplomatic efforts of Egypt, the Secretary-General and other global actors, we were concerned about the time the Council took to respond. Pursuant to resolution 1860 (2009), the Council should now take immediate measures to bolster the ceasefire, ensure the protection of civilians and fully lift the blockade that has been imposed by Israel.

The Committee welcomes the historic adoption of resolution 67/19 by the General Assembly, which is the first step towards full recognition of the State of Palestine as a State Member of the United Nations, a matter which is currently before the Council. The resolution has created a new reality that can give new impetus to the peace process and promote respect for international law. During its conferences and meetings in 2013, our Committee will deploy considerable efforts to analyse the resolution's specific impact in legal, political and socioeconomic terms.

The changing situation on the ground is a cause of major concern. We condemn the confiscation of Palestinian revenues and the destabilization of its institutions by Israel, and we call for them to cease immediately. All financial disputes must be settled through negotiation. We thank the donors who have increased their emergency aid and call on others to fulfil their unpaid pledges as soon as possible. Our roundtable on assistance to be held in Rome on 27 and 28 February, and to which Council delegations are invited, will focus on the new opportunities and the new challenges that result from resolution 67/19.

Our committee is encouraged by the diplomatic community's strong condemnation of the new settlement programmes decided upon by Israel, particularly in E-1. Those programmes must be stopped immediately. We would like to thank all members of the Council who have spoken out in framework of the "15 minus 1" configuration. Nevertheless, we note that the Security Council remains paralysed on that issue.

Our Committee will continue to remind States that they have the responsibility not to contribute to violations committed by Israel and to ensure that Israel respects the Fourth Geneva Convention, as reaffirmed by the International Court of Justice. We will continue to advocate for Palestinian unity and a resumption of the peace process on the internationally accepted bases.

The time has now come for all partners, especially the European Union, the League of Arab States, a revitalized Quartet and the Security Council to work hand in hand on bold initiatives to turn 2013 into a year of peace. They can count on our Committee's full support in this endeavour.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I welcome the presence here today of the Palestinian Minister for Foreign Affairs, **M.** Riad Malki. Palestine recently attained non-member observer State status in the United Nations. This was far too late, coming some 65 years after the adoption of resolution 181 (II). It was the first step on the path towards the realization of the Palestinian people's inalienable right to establish an independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital, within the borders of 4 June 1967.

To that end, we call on the Security Council to respond to the call of the Palestinian State to be granted full Member State status in the United Nations, while guaranteeing the restoration of all the legitimate rights of all of the Palestinian people, including the return of Palestinian refugees to their motherland and the provision of compensation in a fair and equitable manner pursuant to resolution 194 (III) of 1948 for the losses incurred.

I can affirm that the Palestinian people, following the panoply of United Nations meetings that have been held since the Israeli occupation began, view us with skepticism. How could it be otherwise, given the fact that these people have been held hostage for more than 65 years under the most abject forms of racist and expansionist occupation? How could it be otherwise, given the continued systematic campaign of settlement activity, which has stamped out any hope for the emergence of a viable Palestinian State, halting not even for a single day? How, indeed, could it be otherwise, given that Israel, the occupying Power, has practiced and continues to perpetrate the worst forms of racial discrimination and flagrant violations of human rights and international humanitarian law? How could they not look with skepticism on the informal periodic meetings at which the Council has proven incapable of putting an end to the tragic suffering of these people and restoring their legitimate rights, ceding instead the large part of its prerogatives to the Quartet, which itself has failed to tackle the situation, seeking instead to sideline the General Assembly?

In the light of the unflinching support that several members of the Quartet have given to Israel, how could it be otherwise?

If we wish to preserve what is left of the credibility of the United Nations, uphold the prospects for peace in the region and prevent war, then the United Nations and its Member States must refrain from the ceremonial and business-as-usual approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That approach lacks any serious content and cannot lead to tangible results on the ground. It is time to start taking concrete measures to bring to an end once and for all the inability of the United Nations to fulfil its obligations to stop the Israeli occupation of Arab territories — an inability that, as we all know, is the result of the intransigence of successive Israeli Governments, which have themselves been blindly supported and unfairly justified by a number of influential Powers present and active in the Council.

We were deeply alarmed by the fact that, in his briefing two days ago on priorities for 2013, the Secretary-General failed to include a reference to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was not included among the priorities. We are all the more alarmed as the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process also failed in his briefing to refer to an essential component of his mandate and obligations — addressing the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan — even when it was brought to his attention and other representatives of the Secretariat warned him of the consequences of ignoring this essential component of the international stance on the Middle East.

This is an essential point; the occupied Syrian Golan is an integral part of the item before the Council. The representatives of the Secretary-General must therefore refer to the occupied Syrian Golan in their briefings and statements. In his briefing to the Security Council, the Special Coordinator avoided making any allusion whatsoever to the Golan, even though it is part of his mandate. Instead, he referred at length to the prevailing internal situation in Syria, even though that is not part of his mandate.

More than 45 years have passed since Israel occupied the Golan. However, apparently these long decades have not been enough to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular resolutions 497 (1981), 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), to bring its occupation of the Syrian Golan, its grave and systematic violations of human rights, its terrorist policy of racial discrimination and reprisals, and its unbridled expansionist activities to an end.

We call on Israel to provide international supervisors and organizations with maps of the areas that have been mined in the Syrian Golan. The explosion of cluster munitions and mines placed by the

occupying Power in the Syrian Golan have led to over 726 casualties, including 227 children. We have brought this information to the attention of the Secretary-General.

The most recent such acts of violence saw an increase in the number of abductions of Syrian citizens from the disengagement zone by the occupying Israeli Power. The Israeli authorities have even gone so far as to provide support to armed terrorist groups operating in the disengagement zone so as to exploit them to justify the construction of a wall of separation and racial discrimination that stretches 42 kilometres along the ceasefire line in the occupied Golan.

The intention of Israel and the occupying authorities is to pursue their unbridled attempts to tear the Golan from Syria and to include it as part of its occupation.

We underscore the need for the Golan to be returned in its entirety to my country. We call for the Golan to be restored to Syria, whether or not this is acceptable to the Israeli representative. In spite of the perpetration of all Israel's crimes; in spite of all the resolutions adopted by the United Nations; and in spite of all the reports that have been drawn up by the United Nations commissions of inquiry, condemning and describing these crimes unequivocally, it is truly regrettable that the Israeli leaders and perpetrators of these war crimes and crimes against humanity continue to shirk any responsibility or accountability at the international level because of the illegal immunity that has been granted to them by certain influential States.

We all witnessed this morning the insolence of the representative of Israel who, in his statement, unequivocally demonstrated that he is completely divorced from reality and operating in a state of political delirium and immoral hallucination, completely denigrating the rights of the Palestinian people. The Israeli representative is misled if he believes that he can alter or distort in any way the historic reality through a statement that is full of lies and political trickery. We call upon himto read this book *The General's Son*.

(*spoke in English*)

The General's Son is a kind of biography written by Miko Peled, son of the famous Israeli General Matti Peled. He is considered to be one of the most prominent Israeli generals who participated in Israel's wars against its neighbours in 1948, 1956 and 1967. The General, who passed away in 1995, converted to peace and became a peace activist in Israel. The author speaks about the wrongdoings of Israel's policies towards the Palestinian people as well as towards the Arabs in the occupied territories. By the way, this man lives in Israel and is an Israeli citizen, but the book was published in Ramallah. The Palestinians authorized the publication of this book. The Israeli Government prevented it from being published.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Once again, I am obliged to warn of the unbridled attempts of a number of delegations to water down the agreed traditional terms of reference concerning the situation in the Middle East by addressing other subjects at this debate and seeking to distance us from the matter at hand for the sake of pursuing their own objectives. The issue is putting an end to Israel's occupation of the occupied Arab territories and the establishment of a Palestinian State.

Accordingly, I shall not respond to the fraudulent allegations that have been made by a number of delegationsagainst my country, Syria, during this debate, as this is a matter of principle. We must not find ourselves discussing an agenda item that we have often drawn warning attention to. Naturally, there is a great deal we could say to refute the allegations that have been put forward by some member States that have spared no effort in seeking to further exacerbate the crisis in Syria by supplying, sheltering and arming extremists and terrorists operating in Syria in order to stymie any possibility of finding a peaceful solution to the crisis. In this regard, I should like to point specifically to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey.

I shall be brief on this matter and will simply underline the fact that the Syrian Government recently submitted a comprehensive political programme for a resolution of the current crisis in Syria. This document is a national solution, based on dialogue between and among the Syrians themselves under Syrian leadership. We call upon all those who claim to be committed to resolving the situation in Syria to respond positively to this programme by putting forward constructive ideas to enable its implementation instead of rejecting political solutions or national dialogue. The crisis in Syria will find a peaceful solution on the Syrian scale.

Finally, our preference would have been for the first statement that was made to the Security Council by our colleague from the United States at the start of President Obama's second mandate, as well as the

statements made by our colleagues the representatives of France and the United Kingdom, to have been balanced in nature and to have been based on the reality on the ground in Syria, in keeping with their obligations pursuant to the Charter of the United Nations, the Geneva Conventions, international law, and Mr. Brahimi's mandate. Their statements outght to have been open to the priority of supporting the national dialogue mechanism to resolve the crisis in Syria in both a political and peaceful manner, on the basis of the aspirations of the Syrian people and led by Syrians themselves, as is recalled in the two resolutions addressing the Syrian crisis. Instead, they expressed support for one entity of the Syrian opposition, inciting it to operate against the motherland and the interests of the Syrian people, and thereby pushing them into a cycle of destruction and violence in my country.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): I thank Pakistan for scheduling this very important open debate on the situation in the Middle East. Allow me to express our appreciation to the Foreign Minister of the observer State of Palestine for his speech this morning. I also thank Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry for his briefing.

The Bangladesh delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. In addition, I wish briefly to make certain points that Bangladesh believes to be of importance.

A sustainable resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the issue of Palestine, must be our collective strategic objective. All Member States should pledge complete commitment to this objective and throw their full moral, diplomatic, political and economic support behind its early realization.

It is a disgrace that the people of Palestine are being denied their fundamental rights to self-determination and to live freely in their own land. Palestinians have been denied their right to return home and live in dignity and safety. Achieving a lasting solution in the Middle East will require Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

We are happy that the General Assembly conferred on Palestine non-member observer State status in the United Nations, but we are saddened that, in response, Israel announced on 30 November that it had accelerated planning for the construction of more than 3,000 new housing units in Jerusalem, potentially bisecting the West Bank. There is no doubt that these illegal and unilateral decisions of Israel are counterproductive to achieving a two-State solution. The announced settlement activity would be a breach of both the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The situation is further aggravated by another recent retaliatory announcement by Israel that it would withhold revenue from the Palestinian Authority. We believe that this unjust decision of the occupying Power will impair the Palestinian delivery of much-needed public services.

The situation of thousands of Palestinian prisoners — including women, elected officials and 300 children — in Israeli detention centres also remains a cause of worry. Those detained must either be charged and face trial with judicial guarantees, or be released without delay. Violations of the human rights of these detainees should be stopped. We know that justice delayed is justice denied.

We reaffirm past Security Council decisions that Israeli settlements in the occupied territory are illegal and constitute a major obstacle to peace. We believe that the best guides to achieving a two-State solution are the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions — including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) — the principle of land for peace, the Madrid terms of reference, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative. We reiterate our full support for the realization of an independent, sovereign, contiguous and viable State of Palestine with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and dignity.

With regard to the situation in Lebanon and in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights, my delegation calls for full respect for resolutions 497 (1981) and 1701 (2006). We urge the occupying State immediately to halt its actions to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan Heights in accordance with the relevant resolutions.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri (India): At the outset please allow me to express our appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this quarterly open debate

on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

I should like to thank the Special Coordinator, Robert Serry, for his comprehensive briefing on recent developments in the Middle East, particularly on the Palestinian question. I should also like to join others in welcoming the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the observer State of Palestine, Mr. Riad Malki, in today's debate and in thanking him for his statement. I should also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Israel for his statement.

Amid the unprecedented transformation of the Arab world, the continuing stalemate in the Middle East peace process is clearly not in the interests of the region. There have been no direct talks between Israel and Palestine for more than two years. The efforts of the international community, including those of the Quartet, towards the resumption of direct talks between Israel and Palestine have yielded no results.

Against this backdrop, the overwhelming vote in the General Assembly on 29 November 2012, upgrading the status of Palestine to non-member observer State, was a positive development. It was a decisive achievement for Palestine in the history of its long and arduous struggle to reach its final goal of an independent and viable Palestinian State. India, which has always played a proactive role in garnering support for the Palestinian cause in multilateral forums, co-sponsored that resolution. India will continue to support Palestine's bid for full and equal membership of the United Nations.

Developments in the occupied Palestinian territories since the historic vote in the General Assembly have been most unhelpful to the Palestinian cause. The intensification of settlement activities by Israel in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, despite widespread international condemnation, is creating new realities on the ground, thereby threatening the very premise of a two-State solution. We join others in urging Israel to end the settlement activity in order to allow the Palestinian side to come to the negotiating table.

Settlements, roadblocks and the related infrastructure of occupation continue to cause severe hardship to the Palestinian population. These are also adversely affecting the normal functioning of Palestinian State institutions. The Palestinian Authority is facing a severe financial crisis. The financial crisis could erode the significant progress made in building Palestinian State institutions if immediate attention is not given to the issue. There is an urgent need to support the Palestinian Authority in meeting its budgetary shortfalls.

The blockade of Gaza is in its sixth year. It is affecting essential services, economic activities and infrastructure development. While Israel has taken several measures to allow the flow of essential goods into Gaza, these cannot be a substitute for lifting the blockade. Recent hostilities in Gaza are again a stark reminder to the international community of the dangers that a continuing stalemate in the peace process can bring about. We hope that both parties will continue to uphold the ceasefire agreement and implement its provisions in good faith.

The recent rapprochement between various Palestinian factions is indeed welcome. We hope that efforts towards the promotion of reconciliation will bear fruit soon, leading to the formation of a unity Government, the holding of elections, the reunification of Palestinian State institutions, and measures for the reconstruction and development of Palestinian society.

India has a long history of solidarity with the Palestinian people. In 1975, India was the first non-Arab State to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and in 1988 became one of the first countries to recognize the State of Palestine. India has also extended material assistance to the Palestinian Authority since its establishment, and has been a partner in the socioeconomic development of Palestine in its quest for a life of dignity and self-reliance. Our assistance has been for humanitarian relief, development projects, the establishment of educational and training facilities, budgetary support, and so on.

This year, India has pledged $10 million in budgetary support to Palestine. India also contributes $1 million annually to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Following the three memorandum of understanding's signed during the visit of President Abbas to India in September 2012, India is in the process of implementing projects in the fields of information and communication technology, vocational training and the construction of schools. In addition, India is implementing development projects in Palestine, with Brazil and South Africa as partners in the India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum.

India supports a negotiated settlement resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of

Palestine living within secure and recognized borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and side by side and at peace with Israel, as endorsed in various Security Council resolutions and the Quartet road map. Let me also state here that progress on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks remains critical for lasting peace in the region. We remain hopeful that an environment conducive to direct talks can be achieved in the near future. India stands ready to play its part in our collective endeavours to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Lastly, we remain seriously concerned at the deteriorating security situation and continuing violence in Syria. We strongly condemn all violence and violations of human rights, irrespective of who their perpetrators are. We also condemn in the strongest terms the terrorist acts that have been and continue to be committed in Syria. We urge all the parties to stop violence and engage in an inclusive national dialogue in order to resolve the conflict through peaceful means, based on the internationally approved political and legal basis including the resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012) and the joint communiqué of the Geneva Action Group (S/2012/523, annex).

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Laher (South Africa): South Africa expresses its appreciation to Special Coordinator Robert Serry for his briefing to the Council and for the statements by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel.

My delegation associates itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We have served as a member of the Security Council for the past two years as an elected member, during which time we had the opportunity to take part in discussions on today's subject at least 24 times. Perhaps the question that needs to be asked at this juncture is this: "What has really happened in the past 24 months, or the last few years for that matter?" Our objective response to that question is that over the past few years we have seen the following: the continued occupation of Palestinian land; continued insecurity for the people of Palestine and Israel; the continued blockade of Gaza; continued conflict in Gaza; continued rocket fire into southern Israel; the continued construction of the separation wall; continued threat to regional and international peace and security; and continued inaction by the Security Council.

That is not an impressive record for the United Nations in general, and for the Security Council in particular, on whose watch the situation has deteriorated for decades on end without any hope of a lasting solution. In November of last year, the majority of States Members of the United Nations, including the majority of the members of the Security Council, welcomed Palestine to the United Nations as an observer State.

Last year, the Security Council had the opportunity to affirm Palestine's statehood, but unfortunately it failed to do so. In anticipation of reaction to Palestine's admission to the United Nations, we had warned against any acts of retribution; but, no sooner had we welcomed Palestine into the United Nations fold, that Israel announced that it would withhold Palestinian tax revenues. That retributive reaction is illegal and immoral, as it constitutes collective punishment of the Palestinian population and negatively affects the effectiveness of the Palestinian Authority, which is already facing serious challenges with regard to institution-building and the provision of myriad of public goods. We condemn that act and call on Israel to respect the decision on Palestine as it, in fact, is a positive step towards the realization of the two-State solution.

South Africa condemns the ongoing settlement activities by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories. The continued construction of settlements seriously undermines the two-State solution by isolating East Jerusalem and by threatening the viability and territorial contiguity of a Palestinian State. Those illegal settlements further constitute a major stumbling block in the resumption of direct negotiations, and therefore in the achievement of sustainable peace. It is now high time that the Council speaks with one voice against thpse counter-productive actions. We condemn all acts of violence regardless of where they come from, as they undermine the viability of a two-State solution.

Despite calls on Israel to lift the blockade of Gaza, it continues to execute its policies in the enclave with impunity, without any action from the Council. Israel must stop those policies, as they are contrary to international law and render peace elusive. As we all know, at the heart of the confrontation between the Palestinians in Gaza and the Israelis, lie the latter's

continued illegal occupation of Palestinian land, especially the continuing blockade of Gaza.

The ongoing efforts of Egypt in reconciling the Palestinian parties are indeed commendable. We encourage the Palestinian parties to forge ahead with their reconciliation efforts in order to consolidate the gains made, and act in unity for the permanent liberation of the people of Palestine. We cannot overemphasize enough the importance of the unity of the Palestinian people as they seek to build a new and prosperous nation, whose complete affirmation hinges on the implementation of the two-State solution.

With no peace on the horizon and the Quartet not making any significant progress, we maintain the view that the Quartet's utility should be urgently evaluated. As a member of the Quartet, the Members of the United Nations have an obligation to ask questions about the body's usefulness and the role of the United Nations in this body.

With regard to the situation in Syria, we are deeply concerned about the further deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation, including violence against the Palestinian refugees in the country. South Africa continues to maintain that the only solution to the Syrian crisis is an all-inclusive process of national dialogue, free from any form of intimidation, violence or outside interference aimed at regime change. Syria requires a political transition that reflects the will of its people. In that regard, we once again discourage the arming of all parties, including the opposition.

In conclusion, we believe that in our search for a solution to the Palestinian question we should not lose sight of the broader regional dynamics. We therefore call on the Council and the rest of the international community to accelerate constructive efforts towards the holistic resolution of the Middle East crisis, including the Lebanese and Syrian tracks.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Khiari (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): First, I should like to thank the Pakistani presidency of the Security Council for convening this important meeting. It provides us all with an opportunity to update ourselves on the situation in the Middle East, particularly with regard to the Palestinian question. We would also like to thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Robert Serry, for the valuable report he has submitted. We also thank Mr. Riad Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Palestine, for his important statement to the Security Council.

The 29 November debate in the General Assembly and the vote on resolution 67/19, giving Palestine non-member observer State status, was an important step in achieving its legitimate ambitions (see A/67/PV.44). The resolution reflects the unanimous desire and support of the international community to see a Palestinian State that is independent within the framework of the two-State principle. That historic event shows that there is no alternative to peace and stability and to open new horizons for the people of that region. However, Israel, the occupying Power, still does not understand that this is an opportunity for peace, which is founded on this international decision. Israel has categorically rejected that resolution and the new State that it represents in the region.

That resolution opens the way to genuine peace negotiations. However, Israel has not only refused but has defied the international community by imposing collective punishment on a large scale, withholding tax and customs revenues and continuing its occupation. Because of its negative reaction in response to the Palestinian step, which has been supported by the majority of the international community, Israel is showing the world that it does not want peace. The Israeli response in the face of this international consensus was to continue to build settlements and to step up the building of new ones.

The Israeli decision has negative implications for peace and does not provide the necessary conditions for negotiations. Israel is continuing to neglect its international commitments and is trying to change the facts on the ground. The decision of the Israeli Government to build new settlements is a flagrant violation of the provisions of international law governing the situation for occupied territories, all the more so given that this step changes the character of the occupied territory and threatens to fragment the territory and foreclose the chances for establishing a Palestinian State. Israel is trying to isolate East Jerusalem from the surrounding Palestinian territories of the West Bank so as to make it a Jewish city and prevent a just and comprehensive peace from being achieved. That is a flagrant violation of the two-State solution that is based on international consensus.

It is our hope that in this new year and in the coming months it will be possible to break the deadlock, instead of merely managing the crisis as has been the case in previous years, and to focus attention on resolving it. There should be a new dynamism so as to deal with the real issues underlying the conflict.

It is our hope, in this context, that the leading role of the Security Council, and of the United Nations as a whole, will come into play; it has the responsibility under the Charter to maintain international peace and security. It is our hope that the positive change in the position of a number of States, including members of the Security Council, will continue and that this change will promote the voice of international legality, which we hope to see come into play so as to enable the Palestinian people to enjoy their historical, legitimate right to establish their own independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Sin Son Ho (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Mr. President, allow me first of all to express my thanks to you for having convened this meeting. I wish also to express my appreciation to Mr. Robert Serry, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing to the Council today.

My delegation would like to associate itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

As witnessed by the world last year, on 29 November, General Assembly resolution 67/19, on the non-member observer state status of Palestine, was adopted by the General Assembly with the support of an overwhelming majority. The granting of non-member observer status to Palestine in the United Nations was a historic event that reflected the desire of the international community to put an end to the decades-long Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and to realize the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

My delegation joined in sponsoring and supporting the resolution, along with the majority of the States Members of the United Nations. My delegation would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Palestine once again on its status in the United Nations.

It is, however, deeply regrettable that the Palestinian situation is deteriorating instead of moving in a positive direction, despite the absolute support and the efforts of the international community.

Israel has turned a deaf ear to the just and fair demands of the international community and continued to cling to the aggressive and inhuman policies of illegally occupying Arab territories, expanding settlements, blocking the Gaza Strip, ruthlessly killing civilians and so on.

Israel recently decided to build thousands of new settlement units while confiscating land and seizing money, seriously threatening the basic right to existence of the Palestinian people, as a political reprisal against Palestinian observer State status in the United Nations.

Those are rampant provocative acts and challenges against the majority of States Members of the United Nations, international law and related United Nations resolutions that supported the founding of an independent Palestinian State and durable peace and stability in the Middle East.

Israel's undisguised confiscation of Palestinian land under the pretext of settlement expansion shows clearly that it is none other than Israel that is aggravating the situation and seriously threatening peace and security in the Middle East.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea strongly denounces Israel for its settlement expansion and demands that Israel immediately stop any act undermining peace and security in the region and withdraw its forces from all illegally occupied Arab and Palestinian territories. Israel's continuous provocations are unthinkable without the support and protection of the United States. That clearly shows the hypocritical nature of the United States policy towards peace in the Middle East.

The establishment of an independent State of Palestine is an inalienable sovereign right of the Palestinian people.

It is today a world trend to support the justified struggle of the Palestinian people for an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within 1967 borders.

The number of countries in the United Nations recognizing the State of Palestine has reached more than 130, which represents a majority of the States

Members of the United Nations. The non-member observer State status of Palestine is a great development that encourages us all.

That reality will surely bring about the realization of Palestine's full United Nations membership and the establishment of an independent sovereign State of Palestine.

The Security Council, whose mandate is the maintenance of international peace and security, should pay due attention to the changed realities of today and take strong measures to achieve a fair solution of the Palestinian question and not turn away from Israel's inhuman crimes, such as the blockade of the Gaza Strip and the expansion of settlement units.

If the Security Council, despite the demands of the international community, continues to protect only the interests of a certain specific country in support of Israel, that will have a negative effect on peace and security in the Middle East and damage more than ever before the credibility and reliability of the international community in the Security Council.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to reiterate its full support and consistent stand for the just cause of the Palestinian people regaining their legitimate national rights, including the establishment of an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have the pleasure to speak today on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). At the outset, I would like to convey the Movement's appreciation to the Pakistani presidency of the Security Council for having convened this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

I would like to express the Movement's appreciation for the high-level participation in this important meeting, as well as the report presented by Mr. Robert Serry, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

The Movement believes that Israel's settlement activities constitute grave breaches of international law and violate numerous United Nations resolutions, including resolutions of the Security Council. Such activities undermine the contiguity, integrity, viability and unity of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. This issue also remains the foremost obstacle to peace, impairing all efforts to revive credible peace negotiations aimed at bringing an end to the Israeli occupation and achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

The Non-Aligned Movement expresses its grave concern over the continuing illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The Movement condemns the provocative announcement by Israel, the occupying Power, that it will construct 3,000 settlement units on confiscated Palestinian land in an area east of occupied East Jerusalem, now widely known as the E-1 plan, in addition to declarations regarding the construction of another 3,600 settlement units.

Those deplorable actions in rapid succession are a grave breach of all the principles and rules of international law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, which governs situations in lands under foreign occupation, and are in blatant contempt of the demands and will of the international community and the hand that has been extended in peace by the Palestinian leadership. Israel's illegal settlement activities and the illegal actions by extremist Israeli settlers are also causing extensive physical, economic and social devastation throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. This is deplorable and must come to a complete halt.

The Non-Aligned Movement condemns and rejects those illegal actions by Israel, the occupying Power, which have been deliberately intensified since the General Assembly's adoption of resolution 67/19, which, inter alia, accorded to Palestine the status of non-member observer State in the United Nations. The Movement demands that Israel, the occupying Power, immediately rescind those plans and measures and cease completely all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around occupied East Jerusalem, and abide by all of its legal obligations.

NAM continues to call on the Council to uphold its Charter responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, including with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. NAM also calls on the parties to return to the path of peace on the basis of the long-standing terms of reference of the peace process, including the relevant Security Council resolutions, for the achievement of a just and lasting final settlement.

The Non-Aligned Movement also condemns Israel's decision to withhold the Palestinian tax revenues due to the Palestinian Authority, in violation of agreements reached between the two sides and of international law. On that issue, Israel has also declared that its decision is a reprisal for the adoption of resolution 67/19. Such a deplorable act constitutes a blatant act of piracy and collective punishment. It is impairing the Palestinian delivery of public services, payment of public sector salaries and operation of governmental institutions and is further exacerbating the financial crisis.

The Movement expresses its grave concern over the construction of the apartheid annexation wall in violation of international law, relevant United Nations resolutions and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, of 9 July 2004. It calls upon the international community, including the Security Council, to compel Israel to cease those illegal actions and measures.

The Non-Aligned Movement expresses grave concern over the deteriorating situation and deplorable conditions of thousands of Palestinian prisoners and detainees who continue to be held unlawfully in Israeli jails and detention centres, including at least 300 children as well as women and elected officials, and calls for their immediate release.

The Movement also remains concerned about the critical humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. We call once again for the full and immediate lifting of the illegal Israeli blockade, which has now entered its sixth year and is in violation of resolution 1860 (2009), other relevant United Nations resolutions and international humanitarian law, which prohibits collective punishment of civilian populations under occupation. Israel must promptly and unconditionally open all its crossing points with Gaza and end its continued obstruction of the freedom of movement of persons and of the reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip.

The Non-Aligned Movement remains firm in its conviction of the urgent need for the international community to act resolutely and collectively to fulfil its long-standing commitment to, and responsibility for, the realization of a just solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects, on the basis of international law and the terms of reference of the peace process, including the resolutions of the Council.

The Movement remains resolute in its commitment to continue to assist the Palestinian people in their legitimate quest for dignity, justice and their inalienable right to self-determination in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The achievement of those noble goals is long overdue, and its continued postponement will only put the goal of the two-State solution and the conclusion of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace further out of reach.

The Movement regrets that all efforts to date by international and regional parties, including the Quartet, have failed to achieve any progress owing to the deliberate obstruction by Israel, the occupying Power, its refusal to respect the parameters of the peace process and its insistence on continuing to change the facts on the ground, in total contradiction of the goal of the two-State solution, the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

The Movement also takes this opportunity to express its support for Palestinian reconciliation efforts, which Egypt continues to sponsor, and hopes that Palestinian unity will soon be restored in the interest of the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Turning to Lebanon, the Movement condemns Israel's ongoing violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and calls on all parties concerned to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006) in order to end the current fragile situation and avoid a resurgence of hostilities. Such actions also constitute a threat to international peace and security and are a continuation of Israel's aggression against Lebanon.

Concerning the occupied Syrian Golan, the Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical or demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan and Israeli measures to impose its own jurisdiction and administration there are null and void and have no legal effect. The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The States members of the Non-Aligned Movement reiterate their continuous calls on the Security Council to act urgently to send a clear message to Israel, the occupying Power, that all of those illegal actions will not be tolerated and must be fully halted forthwith. The message must be sent to Israel that it is expected to abide by the rule of law, cease all illegal measures intended

to alter and prejudge the situation on the ground and cease all provocations and incitement. Israel's blatant impunity and disregard for the law cannot be tolerated.

Allow me to speak very briefly in my national capacity to respond to the unfounded references made to my country by the representative of the Israeli regime.

There has been a consensus over the past 65 years that the Palestinian question is the core issue in the Middle East and affects directly or indirectly any other problem in the region. There is also a growing consensus that Israel's continued aggression and unabated atrocities against the Palestinian people lie at the core of the Palestinian issue. Therefore, the Council is today debating the repeated and grave crimes perpetrated by Israeli regime against the Palestinian people, including its establishment of new settlements in Palestine and blocking of the revenue of the Palestinians.

However, the representative of that regime, echoing the words of the representative of its ally State, attempted once again to divert the debate towards Iran and, among other things, referred to Iran's peaceful nuclear programme. The irony is that a regime is talking about Iran's peaceful nuclear activities while it possesses the only stockpile of nuclear arms in our region. The nuclear weapon in the hands of that regime, with its record of State terrorism and aggression, has always been a major concern for the Middle East. It is as absurd as it is appalling that the Israelis now try to hide their atrocious and egregious acts behind empty rhetoric aimed against my country. It is obvious that their propaganda against Iran has always been a smokescreen they send up to mask their actions and to divert public opinion from their land usurpation policies and other crimes.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): At the outset, Mr. President, my delegation would like to thank you for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry, for his comprehensive and detailed briefing. The Indonesian delegation is particularly pleased to welcome the participation of Mr. Riad Malki, Foreign Minister of the State of Palestine, in this meeting.

My delegation associates itself with the statements made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the representative of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Like many members of the international community, Indonesia is very concerned over the absence of progress in the peace process between Israel and Palestine. We are very clear about one thing: the hurdle of illegal settlements is the most potent obstacle to the prospect of peace in the Middle East, with particular implications for the two-State solution. In recent months, Israel has continued its defiance by proclaiming an escalation in settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory and East Jerusalem, including through the so-called E-1 corridor plan. That attitude is an affront to the cause of peace. It must be confronted, and it must be stopped.

Because of those considerations, my delegation reiterates that Israel must fully abide by the resolutions of this Council in respect of settlements. Continued illegal construction and expansion of settlements compounds the problem of fragmentation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. That inevitably hinders the prospect of negotiations.

All the while, Gaza continues to endure widespread suffering caused by Israel's menacing blockade, making recovery almost impossible in that area. Meanwhile, we must also urgently and comprehensively address dire humanitarian needs of the Palestinian Authority, which are directly linked to the damaging and illegal Israeli policy of withholding tax revenues. In that regard, I wish to underline the calls made by the Palestinian leadership for the contributions that the Authority urgently needs in order to carry out its functions, deploy humanitarian relief and develop its capacity.

Indonesia remains ardently supportive of the two-State solution, based on the conviction that an independent State of Palestine, with rights and responsibilities equal to those of other States, will contribute to achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The historic decision by the General Assembly to accord non-member observer State status to Palestine, through resolution 67/19, is indeed a strong testament to the support of the majority of Member States for the struggle of Palestine to exercise its right to self-determination, in line with the principles outlined in relevant Security Council resolutions, the Quartet road

map and the Arab Peace Initiative. However, we must continue our support for Palestine's full membership in the United Nations.

Let me now turn to the situation in Syria, which has been raging for some time now. We must urgently work for an immediate end to the violence and address the dire humanitarian needs of the people. We must also ensure that vital humanitarian assistance can reach the people in need of it, in order to stop the deplorable human suffering of the Syrian people. To complement the work of the Joint Special Representative for Syria, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, the international community must play a more robust role and be united so as to find a comprehensive solution to the situation. Indonesia welcomes the upcoming International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria, to be held later this month in Kuwait.

Finally, we must also start, without delay, a political process aimed at finding solutions that are in accordance with the wishes and aspirations of the Syrian people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Ms. Gunnarsdóttir (Iceland): The conflict in Syria must be stopped. The Council's inability so far to unite in action weakens the prospects for peace. The conflict has already had dire consequences for Syria and the Syrian people. We are all aware of the tremendous cost, with over 60,000 people killed and the already high numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons increasing every day. The Icelandic Government, for its part, decided last week to contribute close to $200,000 to United Nations humanitarian assistance.

The Security Council must take the lead in fostering a political and peaceful solution, for the sake of Syria and the Syrian people as well as for wider regional stability, which could easily be threatened should the conflict continue. Waiting is not an option. The Security Council has the responsibility and the tools to maintain international peace and security, and the situation calls for urgent Council action.

Steps must be taken to ensure that the regime and anyone else responsible for the horrible atrocities committed will ultimately be held accountable. For that reason, Iceland was among 57 Member States that jointly sent the Security Council a letter last week requesting the Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (S/2013/19, annex). We would like to take the opportunity here today to reiterate that request.

The Palestinian people enjoy overwhelming support among the United Nations membership for their inalienable right to self-determination. That was clearly expressed by the membership on 29 November last year, when the General Assembly, in resolution 67/19, welcomed the State of Palestine as a non-member observer State.

That development will hopefully persuade the Security Council to take a more active role in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For too long, especially in the absence of an active peace process, the involvement of the international community has mainly been reactionary, with statements being issued on an ad hoc basis in reaction to individual actions, such as the recent decision of the Israeli Government to go ahead with building new settlements in the E-1 zone. If the international community is indeed committed to the two-State solution, it has to become proactive instead of being a passive bystander.

"We exist." That is a phrase from an appeal sent by Palestinians living in and around the E-1 area asking relevant parties to advocate on their behalf that they not be evicted from their homes and displaced again. "We exist." Those are the words of people who have again and again been victims of demolitions of their properties, rendering them and their families repeatedly homeless. "We exist" is a necessary reminder to us all that, in the end, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is about a people that indeed exist and their land.

Iceland would like to use this opportunity to urge the Security Council to visit the State of Palestine, to reaffirm the illegality of the settlements, to accept the State of Palestine's application for United Nations membership and, finally, to bring the parties back to the negotiation table.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Müftüoğlu (Turkey): As this is the first Security Council open debate on the Middle East since the historic General Assembly meeting of 29 November 2012 (see A/67/PV.44), allow me to start by expressing once again our sincere congratulations to the Palestinian leadership, represented today by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the observer State

of Palestine, on the long-awaited and well-deserved international recognition of Palestinian statehood.

Turkey considers the overwhelming support of the international community to be an initial step towards achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. Yet it is unrealistic to expect that the peace can prevail when the fundamental pillars of the two-State vision are undermined time and again by the settlement policies of Israel. Since the previous open debate (see S/PV.6847), we have learned of the intention of the Israeli Government to build on the so-called E-1 area. Invitations to tender for the construction of new buildings in Kiryat Arba and Efrat, approval to construct 1,500 new units in Ramat Shlomo and the initiation of the planning process to build in Givat Hamatos and Gilo are policies and actions that show the clear intention to render impossible a realistic and viable two-State solution. We also call for the resumption of the transfer of tax and clearance revenues that Israel owes Palestine, in line with the Paris Protocol.

Not only Turkey, but also the vast majority of the international community is seriously worried about such acts. The Secretary-General has also repeatedly voiced his concerns regarding the ongoing illegal settlement activity. As such, statements by the Israeli leadership indicating that no settlements in the West Bank will be removed are regrettable, as is the announcement that no harm to the contiguity between Jerusalem and Maale Adumim will be allowed.

The peace process is going through a crucial period. Amid reports that the prospect of a two-State solution is diminishing every day, the international community should provide its full support and motivate the parties towards results-oriented negotiations. We welcome the recent meetings between President Abbas and Khaled Mashaal as a very important step towards long-overdue Palestinian reconciliation. There is no doubt that a united Palestinian voice will bring further support to the Palestinian cause.

As the elections in Israel are just completed, we sincerely hope that the results will facilitate a way to peace. Turkey will continue to support the peace process and the rightful aspirations of the Palestinian people to internationally recognized statehood, in accordance with United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Turkey therefore welcomed the Palestinian appeal for membership in the United Nations, submitted by President Mahmoud Abbas on 23 September 2011 (S/2011/592, annex I), and continues to support the right of Palestine to be represented under this roof among its international peers.

The ceasefire achieved with the able mediation of Egypt following Israel's latest military operation into Gaza required steps to be taken regarding the lifting of the illegal blockade on Gaza. Yet another two months have passed, adding up to more than five years of collective punishment of the Palestinians living in Gaza. We call on the international community to continue to pursue its efforts to help end that illegal blockade once and for all.

Last week, the Council heard from Ms. Navi Pillay and Ms. Valerie Amos about the humanitarian dimension of the Syrian crisis and the latest developments on the ground. Today, we have listened to the briefing of Special Coordinator Mr. Serry. With more than 60,000 dead, 2 million displaced and 4 million in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, the crisis in Syria is the most rapidly growing humanitarian crisis in the world. The Syrian people are desperately waiting for action from the international community, especially from this very Council. The total number of asylum seekers hosted in 15 active camps in Turkey has reached 158,000. Five more camps are under construction to meet the increasing demand.

We have said many times before, and I repeat once again, that we will continue, with the help of the relevant United Nations bodies and other international actors, to extend our helping hand to the Syrian people during this dire period. That said, we categorically refute the allegations that were unfairly directed at my country earlier today by one of the previous speakers.

It is a fact that crises in the Middle East are not easy to confine. Their ramifications have the potential to threaten regional peace and stability, and even beyond. Things become even more complex when different crises become intertwined. That is exactly what we see in the case of Palestinian refugees in Syria.

Through its overwhelming majority vote, the international community sent a message on 29 November 2012 (see General Assembly resolution 67/19). We hope that the message is read correctly and followed ambitiously. While welcoming the efforts of the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator, Mr. Serry, we call on the international community to give its decisive support to the resumption of comprehensive

peace negotiations between the parties for a just and lasting solution based on international recognition of Palestine, with the 1967 borders and East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace with Israel.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. León González (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. In my national capacity, I wish to underscore some important aspects of the matter before us.

Time and again, such debates on the Middle East region are held by Security Council without achieving any progress on the issue. The main political problem in the Middle East is Israel's systematic aggression against Palestine. The Security Council must play its role in maintaining international peace and security and immediately adopt concrete practical measures so that Israel stops its abuses and illegal policies and practices against the Palestinian people.

Israel's behaviour deliberately contravenes United Nations resolutions and international laws, is a threat to regional and international peace and security, and violates the human rights of an entire people through flagrant, systematic and inhuman abuses that this body should condemn.

The Israeli illegal occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories remains the primary obstacle to achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive solution in the Middle East region. There will not be peace in the Middle East as long as such aggressions continue and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people are not taken into account.

The General Assembly adopted a historic decision on 29 November 2012, when its members, by a majority decision, accorded Palestine non-member observer States status in the United Nations. Cuba co-sponsored General Assembly resolution 67/19, consistent with its long-standing position of support for the cause of the Palestinian people to defend their rights. However, that action must be an interim step towards Palestine's eventual admission as a full State Member of the United Nations, which Cuba fully supports. The Security Council must consider and approve without further delay Palestine's 2011 request for recognition as a United Nations Member State.

The reprisals of the Israeli Government related to the adoption of resolution 67/19 on 29 November 2012 are unacceptable. Its brutality against the Palestinian people has resulted in the deaths of more innocent civilians and in huge material damage that has aggravated the already precarious living conditions of the Palestinian people in that small, besieged territory. Likewise, Israel's decision to withhold tax revenues due to the Palestinian National Authority, in violation of agreements between the two parties and of international law, and the new settlement plans in the occupied Palestinian territories are highly reprehensible actions.

Cuba will continue supporting the Palestinian people in their legitimate and just struggle for self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Cuba calls on Israel to end to its occupation of all Arab territories, and reiterates again its position in favour of a just and lasting peace for all the peoples of the Middle East region.

Cuba is closely following the situation in Syria. The Security Council was not conceived as an instrument to promote regime change. The intentions of some to foment Security Council actions and pronouncements aimed at increasing violence, undermining a sovereign Government, generating insecurity and leading a nation into a social and humanitarian crisis of unforeseeable consequences are cause for concern. The obligation of this organ is to promote peace, not violence; to prevent destabilization, not to finance, arm and train those intent on destabilization; and to protect innocent people, not to use or manipulate them for geopolitical purposes. That is also the responsibility of the Organization as a whole.

A civil war in Syria or an intervention by foreign forces will have serious consequences for international peace and security, particularly the Middle East region. Cuba shares the concern over the loss of innocent lives in Syria and anywhere else in the world. It also condemns violent acts taking place in that country against the innocent civilian population, carried out by all those involved in that or any other conflict. We reject any attempt to make alleged efforts to protect human lives a pretext for foreign intervention, whether directly or with the support of irregular armed groups, including mercenaries who only sow destruction and death.

Cuba reaffirms the right of the Syrian people to exercise full self-determination and sovereignty, without foreign interference or intervention of any kind. The role of the international community at this difficult moment of a United Nations Member State is to help safeguard peace and stability in the country. We reiterate our confidence in the capacity of the Syrian people and Government to solve their internal problems without foreign interference. We demand full respect for the self-determination and sovereignty of that Arab country.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Kohona (Sri Lanka): I join other speakers in commending you, Sir, for convening this important debate. Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Middle East increases anxiety for world peace with each passing day. The world needs proactive leadership to address the critical uncertainty in the region. We believe that it is the responsibility of the parties to create the necessary environment to facilitate peace. The continuing settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories are a crucial factor in the escalation of suspicion and the lack of trust between the parties to the conflict in the Middle East.

The settlement activity of the occupying Power is a clear violation of the law and of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The Security Council, the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and the Economic and Social Council, as well as the International Court of Justice, have all condemned the settlement activity as illegal. The resumption of talks has also been tied to that issue. We are further dismayed by the escalation of illegal settlement activity since the General Assembly's decision to accord Palestine status as non-member observer State of the United Nations. It is an unnecessary provocation in an already difficult situation.

Despite the brief moment of celebration in the General Assembly following the adoption of resolution 67/19 according new status to Palestine, the Palestinians have yet to realize their right to self-determination, independence and sovereignty and remain dispossessed from much of their land. Israel's practice of demolishing Palestinian homes further fuels resentment. The continuation of that practice cannot contribute to confidence-building or the peace process. We encourage the parties to exercise restraint for the sake of the greater goal of peace.

The world must not forget the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially Gaza, where conditions remain unsustainable. Grievances based on violations of economic, social and individual rights have the capacity to ignite violence and even spill over borders. In Gaza, the blockade, which is now entering its sixth year, has created an aid-dependent economy and reinforced a sense of helplessness and extremism. Even a modest improvement in the situation in Gaza will require the lifting of the blockade and the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009).

The United Nations is required to keep the vast majority of the people in Gaza supplied with their minimum necessities. We underline our strong support for the work of the United Nations agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Sri Lanka will continue to encourage political rapprochement between Gaza and the West Bank. The political unity and economic advancement of the Palestinian people will contribute to the viability of the two-State solution. We are pleased that the Palestinian Authority, despite severe political and economic constraints, has made progress in institution-building. We are particularly dismayed at the severe financial hardships being imposed on the Palestine Authority.

While Israel must desist from actions that contravene the established rules of international law and practice, and as we support the two-State solution, we are also conscious of the security needs of Israel. Palestinians and Israelis could enjoy security and peace as neighbours through a mutually agreed political solution, with human rights at its heart.

The peace process, which was once so enthusiastically embraced, is at an impasse and tensions continue to escalate. A climate conducive to peace will be encouraged by a mutual approach sensitive to each other's concerns. Both parties to the conflict must actively pursue every possibility for peace with a view to ultimately establishing an independent State of Palestine, existing peacefully side by side with Israel. Sri Lanka remains committed to the attainment of the

inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and to a two-State solution.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to reiterate the support of our Permanent Mission to the United Nations to your great country, Pakistan, in its duties as President of the Security Council.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela endorses the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The rights of the Palestinian people to their lands are ancestral, and are increasingly besieged and isolated by Israel, the occupying Power. That natural corridor between Asia and Africa, with access to the Mediterranean Sea, and seat of ancient cultures, has been and is a region coveted by colonialists and ancient and modern empires.

Archeological findings reveal that the oldest villages of humankind date back to as many as 9,000 years before our era. Palestine is a trove of thousands of years of history. The epic of Atrahasis, the great sage, tells of a time expressed in Babylonian terms "when gods were in the ways of men" — a time when humans did not inhabit the Earth. The Earth was inhabited only by gods, who were divided into two classes: the Igigi, who worked the land and with their labour fed and eased the lives of the aristocracy of the gods, and the Annunaki, who lived off the work of others. Exhausted by their oppressive labours, the Igigi rebelled against the other gods and claimed luminous life in the sunlight.

So it is that since time immemorial, gods and humans have risen up against oppression and injustice. The myth comes to mind now that the Palestinian people are claiming their inalienable right to exercise authority over their own land and to occupy a worthy place in history, without subjugation and oppression. This umbilical cord connecting a people with its ancestral roots helps to explain the heroic resistance of the Palestinians and of the Arabs of the Middle East in defence of their national and cultural identity.

Permanent members of the Security Council have prevented the Council from promoting arrangements to facilitate a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question, in fulfilment of its primary responsibilities in the maintenance of international peace and security under the Charter of the United Nations. The intensification of the conflict is associated with the impunity enjoyed by Israel, the occupying Power. Its political and military elite, exploiting the support, influence and power of veto of a permanent member of the Security Council, flagrantly violates international law, the human rights of the Palestinian people and international humanitarian law.

The violations of international law by that elite in the occupied territories of the State of Palestine are evident. Their actions include, among others, the trampling of the territorial sovereignty of the Palestinian people, the destruction of the economy, the displacement of populations, the destruction of basic infrastructure and crops, and targeted and mass killings within the framework of its policy of State terrorism. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict also unmasks the imperial political and economic interests associated with the interests of political and economic groups of countries of the region. The desire to control the oil reserves of the Middle East is key to understanding the prevailing situation.

Venezuela reiterates its rejection of the interference of foreign Powers and their support for the terrorist groups in Syria that are responsible for widespread violence aimed at promoting the overthrow of the legitimate Government of President Bashar Al-Assad. We call for the cessation of armed violence in order to find a negotiated political solution to the crisis that is confronting the Syrian Government and opposition forces, taking into account the political initiative proposed by President Bashar Al-Assad a few days ago. We reiterate our full support for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, in accord with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Some members of the Security Council have called attention to the opportunistic manipulation of resolution 1973 (2011), concerning Libya, thereby contributing, fortunately, to containing the warmongering plans of certain countries. The nature of the United Nations and the validity of its Charter are at stake. Foreign intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign States and armed aggression have been the methods of choice used by some Powers to attain their colonialist objectives. On behalf of the alleged defence of democracy and human rights, inspired by the policy of regime change, peoples are massacred and their legitimate institutions destroyed.

We emphasize that there is no good terrorism. All terrorism is harmful, as it promotes the dismantling of States and their sovereignty. Never have terrorism, interventionism and the violation of human rights been acceptable options. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela Government reiterates that political dialogue and the use of peaceful means of settlement of disputes are the most expeditious tools for resolving disputes or conflicts. Sovereign peoples and States solely responsible for designing and implementing their own destiny.

In the current historical circumstances, as the drums of war grow loud, the Sixteenth Summit of the Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Tehran in August 2012 appealed for the resumption and advancement of the Middle East peace process based on resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978), 1397 (2002) and 1850 (2008); the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace; and the Arab Peace Initiative. The dignitaries stated that

> "the construction and expansion of settlements and the Wall...are totally contradictory to the peace process and must be ceased completely for the resumption of credible peace negotiations" .

They also

> "reiterated the necessity and urgency of ending the prolonged, unlawful Israeli occupation of all of the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. They further reaffirmed their long-standing position in support of the achievement of the independence of the State of Palestine in all of the Palestinian Territory occupied by Israel in 1967, including East Jerusalem as its capital" .

In conclusion, the Government of President Hugo Chávez Frías of the Bolivian Republic of Venezuela reiterates its support of the legitimate aspiration of the State of Palestine to become a full Member of the United Nations. We hope that the objections filed by a permanent member of this body will be withdrawn so that the General Assembly is able to approve expeditiously the admission of the State of Palestine as a full Member, in the light of a possible recommendation of the Security Council, consistent with the provisions of the Charter. The Security Council must fully exercise the powers which that legal instrument, the constituting document of the United Nations, accords it in this area.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Rishchynski (Canada) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to thank the Pakistani presidency of the Security Council for this opportunity to share with the Council Canada's views concerning the situation in the Middle East. Canada would like to begin with a few remarks on the situation in Syria.

(*spoke in English*)

In Syria, President Bashar Al-Assad's desperate attempt to cling to power and deny Syrians their legitimate democratic rights is as tragic as its is futile. With more than 60,000 deaths and over 650,000 refugees having been forced to flee the country, the agony of the Syrian people cries out for action. Al-Assad's callous disregard for the suffering or ordinary Syrians has made it appallingly clear that he will not relinquish power voluntarily, while the atrocities he has committed ensure that the conflict will persist so long as he remains. Therefore, we believe it incumbent on the international community to take action. We call on the Security Council to live up to its responsibilities for maintaining international peace and security by imposing binding sanctions against the Al-Assad regime before any more innocent lives are lost needlessly.

Canada stands with the Syrian people in their struggle against tyranny. We have imposed 11 rounds of sanctions on the Al-Assad regime and its supporters. We have provided $23.5 million in humanitarian assistance and have also provided support to Syria's neighbours, which have generously taken on the huge burdens associated with hosting so many refugees. We are also working to support the peaceful democratic opposition, encouraging them to reach out to all Syrian people, including, in particular, the country's diverse ethnic and religious communities. The Syrian opposition coalition must convince Syrians that it is a viable alternative to the Al-Assad regime — one that will respect minority rights, preserve Syria's long tradition of pluralism, and establish a new, peaceful, democratic Government that respects the rights of all of its citizens.

Let me now turn to Iran. Canada continues to believe that the regime in Iran poses the greatest threat to international peace and security in the world today. Regrettably, the regime continues to thwart intensive efforts to find a negotiated resolution to the crisis provoked by its nuclear ambitions. Last week, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

again renewed negotiations with Iran and, regrettably, returned to Vienna empty-handed. Evidence is mounting that Iran's nuclear programme is not exclusively for peaceful purposes, and the Iranian regime seems to have little genuine interest in allaying the concerns of the international community. Canada is deeply concerned that Iran is manipulating support for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy as a cover for a weapons programme that threatens regional and global security. We appeal to the United Nations and all Member States to use their influence with the Iranian regime to press for an urgent and meaningful change in approach, beginning with constructive engagement with both the IAEA and the five permanent members of the Security Council and Germany.

The Iranian regime also, in our view, poses a threat to the fundamental human values that all nations aim to protect and foster. One month ago, the General Assembly adopted, for the ninth year in a row, a comprehensive resolution on the human rights situation in Iran (resolution 67/182). Regrettably, the systematic repression of human rights has continued. Executions, including public executions in stadiums and public parks, and systematic abuses by Iranian security services, the increasing stifling of freedom of expression, persecution of ethnic and religious minorities, and imposition of rigid restrictions on social and cultural life all continue. And, of course, the Iranian regime is the foremost regional sponsor of repression, since it backs Al-Assad's brutal despotism in Syria. The Iranian people deserve better than a closed and airless society, isolated from the international community. Like all peoples, they aspire to the universal values of freedom and democracy. They deserve to live in a country that honours those universal human values, and to enjoy the same rights and freedoms that this Organization stands for.

(*spoke in French*)

Finally, Canada would like to take this opportunity to address the issue of Palestinian participation in this meeting and the fact that its representative is seated behind a nameplate that reads "State of Palestine". We fear that Palestine's participation in this meeting as the State of Palestine creates a misleading impression. On 29 November, in a statement to the General Assembly in the context of its adoption of resolution 67/19, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada, the Honourable John Baird, clearly outlined Canada's position. It has not changed. It should also be emphasized that resolution 67/19 did not confer statehood on Palestine any more than it constituted some kind of recognition of a Palestinian State.

Canada remains committed to the quest for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, whereby two States can live side by side in peace and security. We welcome attempts to encourage the parties to resume direct peace negotiations without delay or preconditions, in accordance with the Quartet's statement of 23 September 2011. We share the goal of a negotiated solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict that will allow two States to live side by side in peace and security.

In our view, allowing the Palestinians to participate under the name of the State of Palestine prejudices the outcome of the final status negotiations and makes a resumption of the peace talks more difficult. It raises expectations without changing the facts on the ground or improving living conditions, and risks giving the false impression that Palestine has achieved statehood. Canada will therefore continue to oppose any attempts by the Palestinians to appropriate a higher status than that which is recognized in the United Nations and other international organizations.

(*spoke in English*)

Clearly, from our perspective, the best path to achieving an independent Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel is for both parties to re-engage in direct negotiations immediately.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Namibia.

Mr. Shaanika (Namibia): I am honoured to participate in today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I would like to express our appreciation to Pakistan for convening the debate, and to Mr. Robert Serry, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his insightful and comprehensive briefing on the prevailing situation.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, but I would also like to add some comments that reflect our national position. Due to the time constraints, I will limit my comments to the situation in Palestine.

There is not a shred of doubt that the situation in the Middle East, particularly in the occupied territory of Palestine, continues to face numerous challenges and the test of time. This is due to a combination of many factors, such as the absence of any political will for pursuing the peace process and to continuing acts of provocation by the occupying Power. Namibia believes that for a negotiation process to succeed, it requires an impartial peace broker and committed and willing partners to carry it through to its logical conclusion. Currently, those factors appear to be entirely absent, and that vacuum is filled by negative activities.

Last year, on 29 November, the General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to accord Palestine non-member observer State status in the United Nations. My delegation supported and voted in favour of resolution 67/19 because we did not see it as an obstacle to the peace process; we thought it would enhance it and send a clear message that international patience was gradually wearing thin. That important gesture by the international community was greeted with peaceful celebrations in the occupied territories and with punishment for the people of Palestine by Israel, the occupying Power.

My delegation noted that following that important vote, Israel, with total disregard for international opinion, announced its intentions to proceed with plans for the settlement construction of more than 3,000 housing units in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and, most alarmingly, indicated that planning would proceed on several thousand housing units in the E-1 area of East Jerusalem. The construction of illegal settlements and the apartheid wall of annexation will not enhance Israel's security, and they mutilate the State of Palestine, thus contributing to a hostile environment that will make the prospect of a two-State solution impossible to achieve. Such activities are also contrary to the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion of July 2004 and constitute grave breaches under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Similarly, we deplore the action of the Israeli Government in withholding Palestinian tax revenue as a punishment for Palestine's admission to the United Nations as a non-member observer State. The upgrading of Palestine's status by the General Assembly is a matter of legitimate aspiration for the people of Palestine and the decision of Member States in the exercise of their sovereign rights and free will.

Namibia shares the conviction that achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, is imperative for the attainment of peace and stability in the Middle East. There is no substitute for negotiations to that end, but the process of negotiation cannot become open-ended. While we express our support for the resumption of the peace process, we caution that it should not be turned into a perpetual orbit with no destination. The overwhelming vote of the General Assembly last year underscored the urgent need to resume meaningful talks.

Genuine peace can come about only when parties to the conflict take bold steps to heal the bleeding wounds and usher in an era of hope and optimism. We have therefore come here today to express our support for the revival of the Middle East peace process, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative, and the existing agreements between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. Similarly, my delegation reaffirms the legitimate right and aspiration of the people of Palestine to their own independent State, and we hope that one day the Council will recommend its full membership of the United Nations.

My delegation wants to make one thing clear. Our position is not biased against Israel, but merely opposed to its actions. We have repeatedly acknowledged that Israel, like any other country on Earth, is duly entitled to adequate security. That ought to be recognized and acknowledged. However, the pursuit of security should not be a blatant excuse to violate the human rights of the people of Palestine. It is our firmly held conviction that the only way that Israel can guarantee its security is through the creation of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State that would exist side by side with Israel, inside internationally recognized borders. It is only then that the leopard will be able to lie with the lamb and the calf will graze together with the lion cub.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Botswana.

Mr. Ntwaagae (Botswana): At the outset, Mr. President, allow me to express my delegation's deep appreciation to the presidency of Pakistan for organizing this open debate, which is the third so far under your presidency.

It is reassuring and most gratifying that the Security Council's open debates, which address a number of subjects, have become customary. These debates provide an excellent opportunity for countries that, like mine, do not have the privilege of serving on the Council to participate, share views and make a contribution in our own small way to global discourse.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement that has been delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Since December 2010, the world community has witnessed a transformation of epic proportions ushered in by a revolutionary wave of demonstrations, protests and legitimate struggle for freedom and economic emancipation as ordinary men, women and youth have asserted their political rights to bring about change throughout the Middle East.

The Arab Spring has sent a strong and clear message across the Middle East and beyond that even the most selfishly ardent of regimes can never perpetuate the status quo for any length of time against the will of the people. It is therefore ill advised for those who, in the eyes of their own citizens, have lost the legitimacy to govern to continue clinging to positions of leadership, unperturbed by the mass loss of lives and destruction of property that come with their insatiable appetite for power.

We are mindful of the fact that, even as we sit around this horseshoe table of the Norwegian Room, the people of Syria have had and continue to endure immeasurable hardship and violence, ironically visited upon them by those sworn to protect them and ensure the welfare of their State. The world has, regrettably, stood by helplessly as the regime of President Bashar Al-Assad brutally persecutes its own people. Since the beginning of the conflict 23 months ago, more than 60,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed. The number of the internally displaced and those fleeing the violent repression has more than doubled as more and more Syrians increasingly find the situation in their country unbearable.

It is for that reason that the United Nations, and in particular the Security Council, consistent with its Charter responsibilities, need to assume a higher moral ground in preventing further massacres of innocent civilians in Syria. The Security Council has choices to make with regard to the question of Syria. The first choice is whether to continue with the current business-as-usual approach, whereby some Members are preoccupied with the pursuit of strategic interests and priorities that are not exogenous to the suffering of the Syrian people. The second and most desirable choice is to desire and ensure for the Syrian people all that is enjoyed by the respective populations of all the protagonists, which is a livelihood that is not dictated by bombs, massacres and gun battles. For once, the images of frightened children amid collapsing walls and rubble should be replaced by the laughter and smiles of happy children with their families.

Botswana is among the 50-plus countries that have signed a letter supporting the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (S/2013/19, annex).

On a related issue, it is a matter of deep regret that, for generations now, the efforts of the international community to find a durable solution to the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, have been fruitless. Botswana has consistently expressed its position in various forums that there is merit in the two-State solution. We believe in the coexistence of Israel and Palestine, living side by side as two sovereign States that share not only a border, but a common desire for peace, security and prosperity.

In the interest of peace and the protection of innocent lives of civilians, and for future generations that will know no violence, the people of Middle East need to embrace the virtue of dialogue and reject the folly of violence. We therefore urge the parties to this conflict to summon the necessary will and courage to address all the hurdles that have so far prevented the achievement of a balanced outcome acceptable to all concerned.

It is also imperative that all the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions dealing with this particular issue be fully implemented and respected. That will go a long way in promoting basic humanitarian principles, international law and international humanitarian law, by all parties to the conflict.

Botswana fully supports the intensification of international diplomatic efforts aimed at creating an atmosphere conducive to furthering negotiations, the outcome of which should be mutual recognition and the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. To that effect, we wish to echo the call of the international community for

each of the parties to fulfil its obligations and act in accordance with the various international instruments, and to refrain from any steps that could undermine the momentum of the negotiating process.

In the same context, Botswana encourages both parties to shun violence and constructively engage in acts that support rather than undermine peace. It is for that reason that the State of Israel should heed calls to end its settlement activities in order to provide an impetus for the delicate process of remoulding a peaceful accord.

In conclusion, transformative change and accommodation in the Middle East should be the greatest reward for the children of the region who face constant confrontation and violence, in order that they too can live the peaceful and dignified lives that are experienced by their counterparts elsewhere in the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Hamadi (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, allow me at the outset to congratulate you on your presidency of the Security Council this month and for the work that you are doing, particularly in convening today's meeting. I would like to thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing this morning. I welcome the presence of Mr. Riad Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine.

Last year, we saw a historic turn when Palestine was granted the status of non-member observer State by the General Assembly, following the recognition of the State of Palestine by a majority of States in the world. Although that event was long delayed, it did take place, and in the right forum. However, that is still not enough. Consensus on finding a solution for the question of Palestine and for achieving peace in the Middle East through the two-State solution requires the recognition of Palestine as a full State Member of the United Nations. We therefore invite the Security Council to support those efforts.

Despite that international consensus, the Government of Israel has not expressed a sincere interest in the two-State solution or a genuine desire for peace based on it. The strongest proof of Israel's reaction to Palestine being granted observer State status was its stepping up its illegal settlement activities, causing 14 members of the Security Council to reject those measures, which clearly stand in the way of peace. Accordingly, we invite the Security Council to meet in order to explicitly condemn illegal Israeli settlements and to promote the peace process in accordance with instruments of international legitimacy and terms of reference, and to generate the political will likely to result in a just and lasting solution.

In addition to settlements, Israel is treating the issue of East Jerusalem in a way that does not serve the cause of peace. We would again insist that measures taken by the Israel to Judaize Al-Quds and suppress that holy city's Arab and Islamic identity are null and void and without legal effect. Al-Quds will remain an Arab, Islamic and Christian city with its mosques and churches. There will be no Palestinian State without Al-Quds and there will be no Al-Quds without the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Security Council must therefore adopt a decision or resolution that establishes an international committee to investigate unjust Israeli practices and all measures undertaken by Israel to eliminate the Arab Islamic identity of Al-Quds.

A number of Palestinian prisoners have highlighted their suffering by undertaking a hunger strike. We ask that an end be put to their suffering and that Israel be obliged to release them. We also call for the lifting of the economic siege and of the withholding of tax and customs revenues imposed on Palestinians and on the Palestinian Authority. Israel's unfair policies do not serve the cause of just and lasting peace in any way whatsoever. We hope that the new Israeli Government will adopt an approach that is in harmony with the peace process and in accordance with international law.

In that regard, we reiterate that the solution to the crisis in the Middle East depends on Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories, the occupied Syrian Golan and the remaining Lebanese territory occupied by Israel, as well as an end to Tel Aviv's violations of Lebanese sovereignty. The State of Qatar is committed to supporting the brotherly Palestinian people in order that it may obtain its full inalienable rights.

The State of Qatar contributes to the relief efforts in Gaza through reconstruction efforts following the Israeli aggression. We note in that regard the visit to Gaza of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar, who expressed the solidarity of the Government and the people of the

State of Qatar with the besieged Palestinian people. He undertook to contribute to the rebuilding of Gaza through a number of projects involving basic services, including schools and hospitals. The Security Council must convey a firm message to Israel to end the unjust siege and stop bombing civilians.

With regard to Syria, the Council was briefed last week by Ms. Navi Pillay and Ms. Valerie Amos with regard to human rights, emergency assistance and the need to provide aid to that brotherly country. I recall that early this year and for the first time in several months, the United Nations issued an estimated death toll in Syria, which has reached over 60,000, while the number of Syrian refugees could exceed 1,100,000 before the middle of the year. These figures do not even take into account the internally displaced or those who suffer food insecurity and lack fuel, energy and other basic services. They do indicate, however, that Syria is experiencing an urgent humanitarian disaster that requires an international intervention on the part of the United Nations and the international community.

The sole party responsible for the deterioration of the situation in Syria is the Syrian regime, which met the will of its people with heavy weapons. The international community, including the State of Qatar, has tried to support a peaceful solution to the crisis through the efforts of representatives like the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, in the hope that the Syrian regime would respond to his appeals and to the voice of reason. But at every turn it impedes those endeavours, choosing instead a bloody approach and a destructive security situation. Here, I am referring specifically to the statements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Syrian regime, which described the Joint Special Representative as biased towards a conspiracy targeting Syria. That demonstrates that the Syrian regime is not at all ready to engage positively with the international community or the Syrian opposition.

The recent reports of the use of toxic substances by the regime in the area of Homs point to the use of chemical weapons, proving that the regime disregards the lives of its citizens. The regime has killed or injured hundreds of thousands of citizens, destroyed entire neighbourhoods and villages, schools and universities. It has attacked citizens who were buying bread. It has committed the worst possible crimes — the slaughter of women and children with knives, rape and the desecration of places of worship and the looting of property.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Sarki (Nigeria): My delegation wishes to express its appreciation to your delegation, Mr. President, for convening this debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We welcome Mr. Riad Malki, Foreign Minister of the observer State of Palestine, to this meeting, and we also the Special Coordinator of the Middle East Peace Process and Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Robert Serry, for his briefing to the Council.

We would like to associate ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

My delegation welcomes this opportunity to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We believe that with sustained focus and enduring attention, the international community will find a just, peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict.

It is in this connection that we call for a halt to Israeli settlements. Palestinian land is taken for the construction of more Jewish settlements despite the opposition of the international community, including in the Security Council. A case in point is the planned construction of settlements in the so-called E-1 region of Palestine. The construction of the so-called separation wall, which has been declared an illegal act, is another case in point. Those and similar acts will only serve to threaten the viability of the two-State solution and impede the peace process and final status decisions.

Nigeria believes that the stalled peace process could be re-energized through direct negotiations between the parties. We urge the Quartet to spare no effort to create an enabling environment for those talks to thrive. We are mindful of the need for the presence of the political will, and we call upon both parties to come to the negotiating table without preconditions. The status quo must be altered and the State of Palestine must be created, living side by side in peace and security with its neighbour Israel, within boundaries recognized by the rest of the world, with its capital in East Jerusalem.

The situation in Gaza is cause for concern. The Israeli blockade of the Strip, which continues to incapacitate the economic and social life of the area,

has worsened the plight of the people, who struggle daily. That continued blockade, which leaves the most vulnerable of society, particularly women and children, in abject penury, remains a scar on the collective conscience of the international community. It violates humanitarian and human rights laws, as well as relevant United Nations resolutions and other conventions of which Israel is a signatory. We therefore call on Israel to fulfil all its obligations as specified in those conventions.

Nigeria believes that the two-State solution is the best option to resolve the protracted conflict in the Middle East. It not only recognizes the right of the State of Israel to exist, but to exist in peace and security. We therefore echo the call of Mr. Serry for concerted action with a view to salvaging the two-State solution.

My delegation believes that there exists an opportunity for both Israel and Palestine to live side by side as independent sovereign entities and that both parties to the conflict need to show genuine commitment to the negotiation process. The right of Israel to exist should be recognized by Palestine, while Israel should withdraw to its pre-1967 border and should cede East Jerusalem to Palestine to serve as the capital of the Palestinian State. In light of that, on 29 November 2012 my delegation voted in favour of General Assembly resolution 67/19, according Palestine the status of a non-member observer State. We now look forward to the admission of Palestine as a fully fledged, independent and sovereign Member of the United Nations, as it rightly deserves. That is long overdue, and we hope that it will be realized this year.

With regard to the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, Nigeria desires to see a speedy and peaceful settlement of the crisis, driven by a national reconciliation process led by Syrians themselves. It is our view that while the Security Council seems deadlocked on the matter and does not seem to be inclined to move quickly on the crisis, all sides in the Syrian conflict should not use that fact as a convenient excuse to destroy their country and continue to inflict untold hardships on their helpless populace.

External involvement should assist rather than polarize the parties to the conflict and compound sentiments that are already extremely opposed to each other. We deplore the continued deterioration of the situation in Syria and observe with regret that the international community has failed to bring it to an end by using the instruments of dialogue, mediation and conciliation. We believe that the international community, especially the United Nations, has the moral responsibility to ensure that the Syrian Government and the rebels cease all hostilities in the overall interests of the country and the region as a whole.

Peace must be allowed to return to Syria, and all sides to the conflict must adhere to the rule of law and exhibit basic decency and consideration for the suffering of their people. The international community should therefore help the parties come together and resolve their differences peacefully, like brothers and sisters. Let the people of Syria themselves resolve their differences, assisted only by impartial and well-meaning outside involvement.

The President: The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Mottaghi Nejad (Islamic Republic of Iran) (*spoke in French*): I know it is late and that we are all exhausted after the long debate in this Chamber today. Our debate was essentially on the developments in the Middle East. But I ask the Council to be bear with me for a few moments, so that I may respond to what the representative of Canada said regarding my country.

Canada has once again abused the Council by making completely impertinent accusations against my country during today's debate. In its speech, it referred in particular to our nuclear programme, which is essentially aimed at producing energy and electricity. It is regrettable that the representative of Canada forgot to say that Israel is the only country in our region that possesses nuclear weapons.

(*spoke in English*)

Turning to the allegations regarding human rights, I should say that, unfortunately, the countries claiming to be the bulwark of democracy and champions of human rights are suffering from political paranoia and manipulating human rights issues to achieve their politicized and biased goals, while, on the contrary, it is well documented by the international human rights monitoring bodies that their own records in this field are seriously tainted.

Canada is a prime example in that regard. The fact that human rights in Canada have been systematically denied to large parts of its population, irrespective of the political ideology of the different Governments and

political parties in power, is well known. From failing in the scope of its international obligations, to failing in a constitutional and legislative framework, to failing in equality and non-discrimination, the right to life, liberty and the security of persons, to failing minorities and indigenous persons — there seems to be no area where Canada has not disgraced itself before humanity when it comes to upholding human rights. I think that that is enough for tonight.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 7.05 p.m.